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THEO.

A SPRIGHTLY LOVE STORY.

BY MRS. FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

AUTHOR OF "KATHLEEN," "PRETTY POLLY PEMBERTON," "LINDSAY'S LUCK," "IN CONNECTION WITH THE DE WILLOUGHBY CLAIM," "THE MAKING OF A MARCHIONESS," "THE METHODS OF LADY WALDERHURST," ETC.

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MRS. BURNETT'S NOVELETTES.

Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett is one of the most charming among American writers. There is a crisp and breezy freshness about her delightful novelettes that is rarely found in contemporaneous fiction, and a close adherence to nature, as well, that renders them doubly delicious. Of all Mrs. Burnett's romances and shorter stories those which first attracted public attention to her wonderful gifts are still her best. She has done more mature work, but never anything half so pleasing and enjoyable. These masterpieces of Mrs. Burnett's genius are all love stories of the brightest, happiest and most entertaining description; lively, cheerful love stories in which the shadow cast is infinitesimally small compared with the stretch of sunlight; and the interest is always maintained at full head without apparent effort and without resorting to the conventional and hackneyed devices of most novelists, devices that the experienced reader sees through at once. No more sprightly novel than "Theo" could be desired, and a sweeter or more beautiful romance than "Kathleen" does not exist in print, while "Pretty Polly Pemberton" possesses besides its sprightliness a special interest peculiar to itself, and "Miss Crespigny" would do honor to the pen of any novelist, no matter how celebrated. "Lindsay's Luck," "A Quiet Life," "The Tide on the Moaning Bar" and "Jarl's Daughter" are all worthy members of the same collection of Mrs. Burnett's earlier, most original, best and freshest romances. Everybody should read these exceptionally bright, clever and fascinating novelettes, for they occupy a niche by themselves in the world's literature and are decidedly the most agreeable, charming and interesting books that can be found anywhere.

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"THEO."

CHAPTER I.

PREPARING FOR A JOURNEY.

A heavy curtain of yellow fog rolled and drifted over the waste of beach, and rolled and drifted over the sea, and beneath the curtain the tide was coming in at Downport, and two pair of eyes were watching it. Both pair of eyes watched it from the same place, namely, from the shabby sitting-room of the shabby residence of David North, Esq., lawyer, and both watched it without any motive, it seemed, unless that the dull gray waves and their dull moaning were not out of accord with the watchers' feelings. One pair of eyes—a youthful, discontented black pair—watched it steadily, never turning away, as their owner stood in the deep, old-fashioned window, with both elbows resting upon the broad sill; but the other pair only glanced up now and then, almost furtively, from the piece of work Miss Pamela North, spinster, held in her slender, needle-worn fingers.

There had been a long silence in the shabby sitting-room for some time—and there was not often silence there. Three rampant, strong-lunged boys, and as many talkative school-girls, made the house of David North, Esq., rather a questionable paradise. But to-day, being half-holiday, the boys were out on the beach digging miraculous sand-caves, and getting up miraculous piratical battles and excursions with the bare-legged urchins so numerous in the fishermen's huts; and Joanna and Elinor had been absent all day, so the room left to Theo and her elder sister was quiet for once.

It was Miss Pamela herself who broke the stillness. "Theo," she said, with some elder-sister-like asperity, "it appears to me that you might find something better to do than to stand with your arms folded, as you have been doing for the last half hour. There is a whole basketful of the boys' socks that need mending and—"

"Pam!" interrupted Theo, desperately, turning over her shoulder a face more like the face of some young Spanish gipsy than that of a poor

English solicitor's daughter. "Pam, I should really like to know if life is ever worth having, if everybody's life is like ours, or if there are really such people as we read of in books."

"You have been reading some ridiculous novel again," said Pamela, sententiously. "If you would be a little more sensible, and less romantic, Theodora, it would be a great deal better for all of us. What have you been reading?"

The capable gipsy face turned to the window again half-impatiently.

"I have been reading nothing to-day," was the answer. "I should think you knew that—on Saturday, with everything to do, and the shopping to attend to, and mamma scolding every one because the butcher's bill can't be paid. I was reading Jane Eyre, though, last night. Did you ever read Jane Eyre, Pamela?"

"I always have too much to do in attending to my duty," said Pamela, "without wasting my time in that manner. I should never find time to read Jane Eyre in twenty years. I wish I could."

"I wish you could, too," said Theo, meditatively. "I wish there was no such thing as duty. Duty always appears to me to be the very thing we don't want to do."

"Just at present, it is your duty to attend to those socks of Ralph and Arthur's," put in Pamela, dryly. "Perhaps you had better see to it at once, as tea will be ready soon, and you will have to cut bread for the children."

The girl turned away from the window with a sigh. Her discussions on subjects of this kind always ended in the same unsatisfactory manner; and really her young life was far from being a pleasant one. As the next in age to Pamela, though so many years lay between them, a hundred petty cares fell on her girlish shoulders, and tried her patience greatly with their weight, sometimes. And in the hard family struggle for everyday necessities there was too much of commonplace reality to admit of much poetry. The wearisome battling with life's needs had left the mother, as it leaves thousands of women, haggard, careworn, and not too smooth in disposition. There was no romance about her. She had fairly forgotten her girlhood, it seemed to lie so far behind; and even the unconquerable

mother-love, that gave rise to her anxieties, had a touch of hardness about it. And Pamela had caught something of the sharp, harassed spirit too. But Theo had an odd secret sympathy for Pamela, though her sister never suspected it. Pamela had a love-story, and in Theo's eyes this one touch of forlorn romance was the silver lining to many clouds. Ten years ago, when Pamela had been a pretty girl, she had had a lover—poor Arthur Brunwalde—Theo always mentally designated him; and only a week before her wedding-day, death had ended her love-story forever. Poor Pamela! was Theo's thought: to have loved like Jane Eyre, and Agnes Wickfield, and Lord Bacon, and to have been so near release from the bread-and-butter cutting, and squabbling, and then to have lost all. Poor Pamela, indeed! So the lovely, impulsive, romance-loving younger sister cherished an odd interest in Pamela's thin, sharp face, and unsympathizing voice, and in picturing the sad romance of her youth, was always secretly regardful of the past in her trials of the present.

As she turned over the socks in the basket, she glanced up now and then at Pamela's face, which was bent over her work. It had been a pretty face, but now there were faint lines upon it here and there; the features once delicate were sharpened, the blue eyes were faded, and the blonde hair faded also. It was a face whose youth had been its beauty, and its youth had fled with Pamela North's happiness. Her life had ended in its prime; nay, not ended, for the completion had never come—it was to be a work unfinished till its close. Poor Arthur Brunwalde!

A few more silent stitches, and then the work slipped from Theo's fingers into her lap, and she lifted her big, inconsistent eyes again.

"Pam," she said, "were you ever at Lady Throckmorton's?"

A faint color showed itself on Pamela's faded face.

"Yes," she answered, sharply, "I was once. What nonsense is running in your mind now, for goodness sake?"

Theo flushed up to her forehead, no half flush; she actually glowed all over, her eyes catching a light where her delicate dark skin caught the dusky red.

"Don't be cross, Pam," she said, appealingly. "I can't help it. The letter she sent to mamma made me think of it. Oh, Pam! if I could only have accepted the invitation."

"But you can't," said Pam, concisely. "So you may as well let the matter rest."

"I know I can't," Theo returned, her quaint resignation telling its own story of previous disappointments. "I have nothing to wear, you know, and, of course, I couldn't go there, of all places in the world, without something nice."

There was another silence after this. Theo had gone back to her work with a sigh, and Miss Pamela was stitching industriously. She was never idle, and always taciturn, and on this occasion her mind was fully occupied. She was thinking of Lady Throckmorton's invitation too.

Her ladyship was a half-sister of their father's, and from the height of her grandeur magnanimously patronizing now and then. It was during her one visit to London, under this relative's patronage, that Pamela had met Arthur Brunwalde, and it was through her that the match had been made. But when Arthur died, and she found that Pamela was fixed in her determination to make a sacrifice of her youth on the altar of her dead love, Lady Throckmorton lost patience. It was absurd, she said; Mr. North could not afford it, and if Pamela persisted, she would wash her hands of the whole affair. But Pamela was immovable, and, accordingly, had never seen her patroness since. It so happened, however, that her ladyship had suddenly recollected Theo, whose gipsy face had once struck her fancy, and the result of the sudden recollection was another invitation. Her letter had arrived that very morning at breakfast time, and had caused some sensation. A visit to London, under such auspices, was more than the most sanguine had ever dared to dream of.

"I wish I was Theo," Joanna had grumbled. "She always gets the lion's share of everything, because Elin and I are a bit younger than she is."

And Theo had glowed up to her soft, innocent eyes, and neglected the bread-and-butter cutting, to awaken a moment later to sudden despair.

"But—but I have nothing fit to wear, mamma," she said, in anguished tones.

"No," answered Mrs. North, two or three new lines showing themselves on her harassed forehead; "and we can't afford to buy anything. You can't go, Theo."

And so the castle which had towered so promisingly in the air a moment ago, was dashed to the dust with one touch of shabby gentility's tarnished wand. The glow died out of Theo's face, and she went back to her bread-and-butter cutting with a soreness of disappointment which was, nevertheless, not without its own desperate resignation. This was why she had watched the tide come in with such a forlorn sense of sympathy with the dull sweep of the gray waves, and their dull, creeping moan; this was why she had been rash enough to hope for a crumb of sympathy even from Pamela; and this also was why, in despairing of gaining it, she bent herself to her unthankful labor again, and patched and darned until the tide had swept back again under the curtain of fog, and there was no more light, even for the stern taskmaster, poverty.

The silence was effectually broken in upon after this. As soon as the street lamps began to twinkle in the murkiness outside, the boys made their appearance—Ralph, and Arthur, and Jack, all hungry, and dishevelled, and of course, all in an uproar. They had dug a cave on the shore, and played smugglers all the evening; and one fellow had brought out a real cutlass and a real pistol, that belonged to his father, and they had played fighting the coast-guard, and they were as hungry as the dickens now; and was tea ready, and wouldn't Pam let them have some strawberry-jam?

Pamela laid her work aside, and went out of the room, and then Ralph, who was in the habit of patronizing Theo occasionally, came to his favorite corner and sat down, his rough hands clasped round his knees, boy-fashion.

"I say, Theo," he began. "I wonder how much it would cost a fellow to buy a cutlass—a real one?"

"I don't know," Theo answered, indifferently. "I never bought a cutlass, Ralph."

"No, of course you never did. What would a girl want with a cutlass? But couldn't you guess, now—just give a guess. Would it cost a pound?"

"I daresay it would," Theo managed to reply, with a decent show of interest. "A good one."

"Well, I'd want a good one," said Ralph, meditatively; "but if it would cost a pound, I shall never have one. I say, Theo, we never do get what we want at this house, do we?"

"Not often," said Theo, a trifle bitterly.

Ralph looked up at her.

"Look here," he said, sagaciously. "I know what you are thinking of. I can tell by your eyes. You're thinking about having to stay at home from Lady Throckmorton's, and it is a shame too. If you are a girl, you could have enjoyed yourself in your girl's way. I'd rather go to their place in Lincolnshire, where old Throckmorton does his hunting. The governor says that a fellow that was a good shot could bag as much game as he could carry, and it wouldn't take long to shoot either. I can aim first rate with a bow and arrow. But that isn't what you want, is it? You want to go to London, and have lots of dresses and things. Girls always do; but that isn't my style."

"Ah, Ralph!" Theo broke out, her eyes filling all at once. "I wish you wouldn't! I can't bear to hear it. Just think of how I might have enjoyed myself, and then to think that—that I can't go, and that I shall never live any other life than this!"

Ralph opened his round Saxon eyes, in a manner slightly expressive of general dissatisfaction.

"Why, you're crying!" he said. "Confound crying. You know I don't cry because I can't go to Lincolnshire. You girls are always crying about something. Joanna and Elin cry if their shoes are shabby or their gloves burst out. A fellow never thinks of crying. If he can't get the thing he wants, he pitches in, and does without, or else makes something out of wood that looks like it."

Theo said no more. A summons from the kitchen came to her just then. Pam was busy with the tea-service, and the boys were hungry—so she must go and help.

Pamela glanced up at her sharply as she entered, but she did not speak. She had borne disappointments often enough, and had lived over them to become seemingly a trifle callous to their bitterness in others, and, as I have said, she was prone to silence. But it may be that she was not so callous after all, for at least Theo fancied that her occasional speeches were less sharp, and certainly she uttered no reproof to-night. She was grave enough, however, and even more silent than usual, as she poured out the tea for the boys. A shadow of thoughtfulness rested on her thin sharp face, and the faint, growing lines were almost deepened; but she did not "snap," as the children called it; and Theo was thankful for the change.

It was not late when the children went to bed, but it was very late when Pamela followed them; and when she went up-stairs, she was so preoccupied as to appear almost absent-minded. She went to her room and locked the door, after her usual fashion; but that she did not retire was evident to one pair of listening ears at least. In the adjoining bedroom, where the girls slept, Theo lay awake, and could hear her every movement. She was walking to and fro, and the sounds of opening drawers and turned keys came through the wall every moment. Pamela had unaccountable secret ways, Joanna always said. Her room was a sanctuary, which the boldest did not dare to violate lightly. There were closets and boxes there, whose contents were reserved for her own eyes alone, and questions regarding them seldom met with any satisfactory answer. She was turning over these possessions to-night, Theo judged, from the sounds proceeding from her chamber. To be truthful, Theo had some curiosity about the matter, though she never asked any questions. The innate delicacy which prompted her to reverence the forlorn aroma of long-withered romance about the narrow life had restrained her. But to-night she was so wide-awake, and Joanna and Elin were so fast asleep, that every movement forcing itself upon her ear, made her more wide-awake still. The turning of keys and unlocking of drawers roused her to a whimsical meditative wonder. Poor Pam! What dead memories and coffined hopes was she bringing out to the dim light of her solitary candle? Was it possible that she ever cried over them a little when there was no one to see her relaxing

mood? Poor Pam! Theo sighed again, and was just deciding to go to sleep, if possible, when she heard a door open, which was surely Pamela's, and feet crossing the narrow corridor, which were surely Pamela's own, and then a sharp yet soft tap on the door, and a voice which could have been no other than Pamela's, under any possibility.

"Theo!" it said, "I want you for a short time. Get up."

Theo was out upon the floor, and had opened the door in an instant, wider awake than ever.

"Throw something over you," said Pamela, in the dry tone that always sounded almost severe. "You will take cold if you don't. Put on a shawl or something, and come into my room."

Theodora caught up a shawl, and, stepping across the landing, stood in the light, the flare of the candle making a queer, lovely picture of her. The shawl she had wrapped carelessly over her white night-dress was one of Lady Throckmorton's gracious gifts; and although it had been worn by every member of the family in succession, and was frayed, and torn, and forlorn enough in broad daylight, by the uncertain Rembrandt glare of the chamber-candle, its gorgeous palm-leaf pattern and soft folds made a by no means unpicturesque or unbecoming drapery, in conjunction with the girl's grand, soft, un-English eyes, and equally un-English ebon hair.

"Shut the door," said Pamela. "I want to speak to you."

Theo turned to obey, wonderingly, but, as she did so, her eyes fell upon something which made her fairly start, and this something was nothing less than the contents of the opened boxes and closets. Some of said contents were revealed through raised lids; but some of them were lying upon the bed, and the sight of them made the girl catch her breath. She had never imagined such wealth—for it seemed quite like wealth to her. Where had it all come from? There were piles of pretty, lace-trimmed garments, boxes of handkerchiefs, ribbons, and laces, and actually a number of dresses, of whose existence she had never dreamed—dresses quaint enough in fashion, but still rich and elaborate.

"Why, Pam!" she exclaimed, "whose are they? Why have you never—"

Pamela stopped her with an abrupt gesture.

"They are mine," she said. "I have had them for years, ever since Arthur—Mr. Brunwalde died. They were to have been my bridal trousseau, and most of them were presents from Lady Throckmorton, who was very kind to me then. Of course, you know well enough," with dry bitterness, "I should never have had them otherwise. I thought I would show them to you to-night, and offer them to you. They may be of use just now."

She stopped and cleared her throat here, with an odd, strained sound; and before she went on, she knelt down before one of the open trunks, and began to turn over its contents.

"I wish you to go to Lady Throckmorton's," she said, speaking without looking at the amazed young face at her side. "The life here is a weary one for a girl to lead, without any change, and the visit may be a good thing for you in many ways. My visit to Lady Throckmorton's would have made me a happy woman, if death had not come between me and my happiness. I know I am not at fault in saying this to you. I mean it in a manner a girl can scarcely understand—I mean, that I want to save you from the life you must lead, if you do not go away from here."

Her hands were trembling, her voice, cold and dry, as it usually was, trembled too, and the moment she paused, the amazed, picturesque young figure swooped down upon her as it were, falling upon its knees, flinging its white-robed arms about her, and burying her in an unexpected confusion of black hair and oriental shawl, showering upon her loving, passionate little caresses. For the first time in her life, Theo was not secretly awed by her.

"Why, Pam!" she cried, the tears running down her cheeks. "Dear, old, generous Pamela! Do you care for me so much—enough to make such a sacrifice! Oh, Pam! I am only a girl as you say; but I think that, because I am a girl, perhaps I understand a little. Do you think that I could let you make such a sacrifice? Do you think I could let you give them to me—the things that were to have belonged to poor, dead Arthur's wife? Oh, my generous darling! Poor dead Arthur! and the poor young wife who died with him!"

For some time Pamela said nothing, but Theo felt the slender, worn form, that her arms clasped so warmly, tremble within them, and the bosom on which she had laid her loving, impassioned face throb strangely. But she spoke at length.

"I will not say it is not a sacrifice," she said. "I should not speak truly if I did. I have never told you of these things before, and why I kept them; because such a life as ours does not make people understand one another very clearly; but to-night, I remembered that I was a girl too once, though the time seems so far away; and it occurred to me that it was in my power to help you to a happier womanhood than mine has been. I shall not let you refuse the things. I offer them to you, and expect you to accept them, as they are offered—freely."

Neither protest nor reasoning was of any avail. The elder sister meant what she said, with just the settled precision that demonstrated itself upon even the most trivial occasions; and Theo was fain to submit now, as she would have done in any smaller matter.

"When the things are of no further use, you may return them to me," Pamela said, dryly as ever. "A little managing will make everything as good as new for you now. The fashion only needs to be changed, and we have ample material. There is a gray satin on the bed there, that will make a very pretty dinner-dress. Look at it, Theo."

Theo rose from her knees with the tears scarcely dry in her eyes. She had never seen such dresses in Downport before. These things of Pamela's had only come from London the day of Arthur's death, and had never been opened for family inspection. Some motherly instinct, even in Mrs. North's managing economy, had held them sacred, and so they had rested. And now, in her girl's admiration of the thick, trailing folds of the soft gray satin, Theodora very naturally half forgot her tears.

"Pamela!" she said, timidly, "do you think I could make it with a train? I never did wear a train, you know, and—"

There was such a quaint appeal in her mellow-lighted eyes, that Pamela perceptibly softened.

"You shall have half a dozen trains if you want them," she said; and then, half-falteringly, added, "Theo, there is something else. Come here."

There was a little carven ebony-box upon the dressing-table, and she went to it and opened it. Upon the white velvet lining lay a pretty set of jewels —sapphires, rarely pellucid; then clear pendants sparkling like drops of deep sea-water frozen into coruscant solidity.

"They were one of Mr. Brunwalde's bridal gifts to me," she said, scarcely heeding Theo's low cry of admiration. "I should have worn them upon my wedding-day. You are not so careless as most girls, Theodora, and so I will trust them to you. Hold up your arm and let me clasp one of the bracelets on it. You have a pretty arm, Theo."

It was a pretty arm in truth, and the flashing, rose-tinted pendants set it off to a great advantage. Theo, herself, scarcely dared to believe her senses. Her wildest dreams had never pictured anything so beautiful as these pretty, modest sapphires. Was it possible that she—she was to wear them? The whole set of earrings, necklace, bracelets, rings, and everything, with all their crystallized drops and clusters! It was a sudden opening of the gates of fairyland! To go to London would have been happiness enough; but to go so like an enchanted princess, in all her enchanted finery, was more than she could realize. A color as brilliant as the scarlet in Lady Throckmorton's frayed palm-leaf shawl flew to her cheeks, she fairly clapped her hands in unconscious ecstasy.

"Oh, Pam!" she cried, with pathetic gratitude. "How good you are—how good—how good! I can't believe it, I really can't. And I will take such care of them—such care of everything. You shall see the dresses are not even crushed, I will be so careful." And then she ended with another little shower of impulsive caresses.

But it was late by this time, and with her usual forethought—a forethought which no enthusiasm could make her forget—Pamela sent her back to bed. She would be too tired to sew to-morrow, she said, prudently, and there was plenty of hard work to be done; so, with a timid farewell-kiss, Theo went to her room, and in opening her door, awakened Joanna and Elin, who sat up in bed, dimly conscious of a white figure wrapped in their august

relative's shawl, and bearing a candle to light up scarlet cheeks, and inconsistent eyes, and tangled back hair.

"I am going to London," the voice pertaining to this startling figure broke out. "Joanna and Elin, do you hear? I am going to London, to Lady Throckmorton's."

Joanna rubbed her eyes sleepily.

"Oh, yes!" she said, not too amiably by any means. "Of course you are. I knew you would. You are everlastingly going somewhere, Theo, and Elin and I stay at home, as usual. Lady Throckmorton will never invite us, I know. Where are your things going to come from?" snappishly.

"Pamela!" was Theo's deprecating reply. "They are the things that belonged to her wedding outfit. She never wore them after Mr. Brunwalde died, you know, Joanna, and she is going to lend them to me."

"Let us go to sleep, Elin," Joanna grumbled, drowsily. "We know all about it now. It's just like Pam, with her partiality. She never offered to lend them to us, and we have wanted them times and times, worse than ever Theo does now."

And then Theo went to bed also; but did not sleep, of course; only lay with eyes wide open to the darkness, as any other girl would have done, thinking excitedly of Pamela's generous gifts, and of Lady Throckmorton, and, perhaps, more than once the strange chance which had brought to light again the wedding-day, that was never more than the sad ghost of a wedding, and the bridal gifts that had come to the bride from a dead hand.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL.

A great deal of hard work was done during the following week. The remodelling of the outfit was no light labor: but Pamela was steady to her trust, in her usual practical style. She trimmed, and fitted, and cut, until the always-roughened surface of her thin forefinger was rougher than ever. She kept Theo at work at the smaller tasks she chose to trust to her, and watched her sharply, with no shadow of the softened mood she had given the candle-lighted bedroom a glimpse of. She was as severe upon any dereliction from duty as ever, and the hardness of her general demeanor was not a whit relaxed. Indeed, sometimes Theo found herself glancing up furtively from her tasks, to look at the thin, sharp face, and wondering if she had not dreamed that her arms had clasped a throbbing, shaken form, when they faced together the ghost of long dead love.

But the preparations were completed at last, and the trunks packed; and Lady Throckmorton had written to say that her carriage would meet her young relative's arrival. So the time came when Theo, in giving her farewell kisses, clung a little closely about Pamela's neck, and when the cab-door had been shut, saw her dimly through the smoky glass, and the mistiness in her eyes; saw her shabby dress, and faded face, and half-longed to go back; remembered sadly how many years had passed since she had left the dingy sea-port town to go to London, and meet her fate, and lose it, and grow old before her time in mourning it; saw her, last of all, and so was whirled up the street, and out of sight. And in like manner she was whirled through the thronged streets of London, when she reached that city at night, only that Lady Throckmorton's velvet-lined carriage was less disposed to rattle and jerk over the stones, and more disposed to an aristocratic, easily-swung roll than the musty vehicle of the Downport cabman.

There was a queer, excited thrill in her pulses as she leaned back, watching the gaslights gleaming through the fog, and the people passing to and fro

beneath the gaslights. She was so near her journey's end that she began to feel nervous. What would Lady Throckmorton look like? How would she receive her? How would she be dressed? A hundred such simple, girlish wonders crowded into her mind. She would almost have been glad to go back—not quite, but almost. She had a lingering, inconsistent recollection of the contents of her trunks, and the sapphires, which was, nevertheless, quite natural to a girl so young, and so unused to even the most trivial luxuries. She had never possessed a rich or complete costume in her life; and there was a wondrous novelty in the anticipation of wearing dresses that were not remodelled from Pamela's or her mother's cast-off garments.

When the carriage drew up before the door of the solid stone house, in the solid-looking, silent square, she required all her courage. There was a glare of gaslight around the iron grating, and a glare of gaslight from the opening door, and then, after a little confusion of entrance, she found herself passing up a stair-case, under the guidance of a servant, and so was ushered into a large, handsome room, and formally announced.

An elderly lady was sitting before the fire reading, and on hearing Theo's name, she rose, and came forward to meet her. Of course, it was Lady Throckmorton, and, having been a beauty in her long past day, even at sixty-five Lady Throckmorton was quite an imposing old person. Even in her momentary embarrassment, Theo could not help noticing her bright, almond-shaped brown eyes, and the soft, close little curls of fine snow-white hair, that clustered about her face under her rich, black-lace cap.

"Theodora North, is it?" she said, offering her a wrinkled yet strong white hand. "I am glad to see you, Theodora. I was afraid you would be too late for Sir Dugald's dinner, and here you are just in time. I hope you are well, and not tired."

Theo replied meekly. She was quite well, and not at all tired, which seemed to satisfy her ladyship, for she nodded her handsome old head approvingly.

"Very well, then, my dear," she said. "I will ring for Splaighton to take you up-stairs, and attend to you. Of course, you will want to change your dress for dinner, and you have not much time. Sir Dugald never waits for anybody, and nothing annoys him more than to have dinner detained."

Accordingly, greatly in awe of Sir Dugald, whoever he might be, Theodora was pioneered out of the room again, and up another broad stair-case, into an apartment as spacious and luxurious as the one below. There her toilet was performed and there the gray satin was donned in some trepidation, as the most suitable dress for the occasion.

She stepped before the full-length mirror to look at herself before going down, and as she did so, she was conscious that her waiting-woman was looking at her too in sedate approval. The gray satin was very becoming. Its elaborate richness and length of train changed the undeveloped girl, to whom she had given a farewell glance in the small mirror at Downport, to the stateliest of tall young creatures. Her bare arms and neck were as soft and firm as a baby's; her *riant*, un-English face seemed all aglow of color and mellow eyes. But for the presence of the maid, she would have uttered a little cry of pleasure, she was so new to herself.

It was like a dream, the going down-stairs in the light and brightness, and listening to the soft sweep of the satin train; but it was singularly undream-like to be startled as she was by the rushing of a huge Spanish mastiff, which bounded down the steps behind her, and bounding upon her dress, nearly knocked her down. The animal came like a rush of wind, and simultaneously a door opened and shut with a bang; and the man who came out to follow the dog, called to him in a voice so rough that it might have been a rush of wind also.

"Sabre!" he shouted. "Come back, you scoundrel!" and then his heavy feet sounded upon the carpet. "The deuce!" he said, in an odd, low mutter, which sounded as though he was speaking half to her, half to himself. "My lady's protege, is it? The other Pamela! Rather an improvement on Pamela, too. Not so thin."

Theo blushed brilliantly—a full-blown rose of a blush, and hesitated, uncertain what etiquette demanded of her under the circumstances. She did not know very much about etiquette, but she had an idea that this was Sir Dugald, whoever Sir Dugald might be. But Sir Dugald set her mind at rest on nearing her.

"Good-evening, Theodora," he said, unceremoniously. "Of course, it is Theodora."

Theo bowed, and blushed more brilliantly still.

"All the better," said this very singular individual. "Then I haven't made a mistake," and, reaching, as he spoke, the parlor door at the foot of the stairs, and finding that the mastiff was stretched upon the mat, he favored him with an unceremonious, but not unfriendly kick, and then opened the door, the dog preceding them into the room with slow stateliness.

"You are a quick dresser, I am glad to see, Theodora," said Lady Throckmorton, who awaited them. "Of course, there is no need of introducing you two to each other. Sir Dugald does not usually wait for ceremonies."

Sir Dugald looked down at the lovely face at his side with a ponderous stare. He might have been admiring it, or he might not; at any rate, he was favoring it with a pretty close inspection.

"I believe Sir Dugald has not introduced himself to me," said Theo, in some confusion. "He knew that I was Theodora North; but I—"

"Oh!" interposed her ladyship, as collectedly as if she had scarcely expected anything else, "I see. Sir Dugald Throckmorton. Theodora—your uncle."

By way of returning Theo's modest little recognition of the presentation, Sir Dugald nodded slightly, and, after giving her another stare, turned to his mastiff, and laid a large muscular hand upon his head. He was not a very prepossessing individual, Sir Dugald Throckmorton.

Lady Throckmorton seemed almost entirely oblivious of her husband's presence; she solaced herself by ignoring him.

When they rose from the table together, the authoritative old lady motioned Theo to a seat upon one of the gay foot-stools near her.

"Come and sit down by me," she said. "I want to talk to you, Theodora."

Theo obeyed with some slight trepidation. The rich-colored old brown eyes were so keen as they ran over her. But she seemed to be satisfied with her scrutiny.

"You are a very pretty girl, Theodora," she said. "How old are you?"

"I am sixteen," answered Theo.

"Only sixteen," commented my lady. "That means only a baby in Downport, I suppose. Pamela was twenty when she came to London, and I remember—Well, never mind. Suppose you tell me something about your life at home. What have you been doing all these sixteen years?"

"I had always plenty to do," Theo answered. "I helped Pamela with the housework and the clothes-mending. We did not keep any servant, so we were obliged to do everything for ourselves."

"You were?" said the old lady, with a side-glance at the girl's slight, dusky hands. "How did you amuse yourself when your work was done?"

"We had not much time for amusements," Theo replied, demurely, in spite of her discomfort under the catechism; "but sometimes, on idle days, I read or walked on the beach with the children, or did Berlin-wool work."

"What did you read?" proceeded the august catechist. She liked to hear the girl talk.

"Love stories," more demurely still, "and poetry, and sometimes history; but not often history—love stories and poetry oftenest."

The clever old face was studying her with a novel sort of interest. Upon the whole, my lady was not sorry she had sent for Theodora North.

"And, of course, being a Downport baby, you have never had a lover. Pamela never had a lover before she came to me."

A lover. How Theodora started and blushed now to be sure!

"No, madame," she answered, and, in a perfect wonder of confusion, dropped her eyes, and was silent.

But the very next instant she raised them again at the sound of the door opening. Somebody was coming in, and it was evidently somebody who felt himself at home, and at liberty to come in as he pleased, and when the fancy took him, for he came unannounced entirely.

Theo found herself guilty of the impropriety of gazing at him wonderingly as he came forward, but Lady Throckmorton did not seem at all surprised.

"I have been expecting you, Denis," she said. "Good-evening! Here is Theodora North. You know I told you about her."

Theo rose from her footstool at once, and stood up tall and straight—a young sultana, the youngest and most innocent-looking of sultanas, in unimperial gray satin. The gentleman was looking at her with a pair of the handsomest eyes she had ever seen in her life.

Then he made a low, ceremonious bow, which had yet a sort of indolence in its very ceremony, and then having done this much, he sat down, as if he was very much at home indeed.

"I thought I would run in on my way to Broome street," he said. "I am obliged to go to Miss Gower's, though I am tired out to-night."

"Obliged!" echoed her ladyship.

"Well—yes," the gentleman answered, with cool negligence. "Obliged in one sense. I have not seen Priscilla for a week."

The handsome, strongly-marked old eyebrows went up.

"For a week," remarked their owner, quite sharply. "A long time to be absent."

It was rather unpleasant, Theodora thought, that they should both seem so thoroughly at liberty to say what they pleased before her, as if she was a child. Their first words had sufficed to show her that "Miss Gower's"—wherever Miss Gower's might be, or whatever order of place it was—was a very objectionable place in Lady Throckmorton's eyes.

"Well—yes," he said again. "It is rather a long time, to tell the truth."

He seemed determined that the matter should rest here, for he changed the subject at once, having made this reply, thereby proving to Theo that he was used to having his own way, even with Lady Throckmorton. He was hard-worked, it seemed, from what he said, and had a great deal of writing to do. He was inclined to be satirical, too, in a careless fashion, and knew

quite a number of literary people, and said a great many sharp things about them, as if he was used to them, and stood in no awe whatever of them and their leonine greatness. But he did not talk to her, though he looked at her now and then; and whenever he looked at her, his glance was a half-admiring one, even while it was evident that he was not thinking much about her. He did not remain with them very long, scarcely an hour, and yet she was almost sorry to see him go. It was so pleasant to sit silent and listen to these two worldly ones, as they talked about their world. But he had promised Priscilla that he would bring her a Greek grammar she required; and a broken promise was a sin unpardonable in Priscilla's eyes.

When he was gone, and they had heard the hall-door close upon him, the stillness was broken in upon by my lady herself.

"Well, my dear," she said, to Theodora. "What is your opinion of Mr. Denis Oglethorpe?"

"He is very handsome," said Theo, in some slight embarrassment. "And I think I like him very much. Who is Priscilla, aunt?"

She knew that she had said something amusing by Lady Throckmorton's laughing quietly.

"You are very like Pamela, Theodora," she said. "It sounds very like Pamela—what Pamela used to be—to be interested in Priscilla."

"I hope it wasn't rude?" fluttered the poor little rose-colored sultana.

"Not at all," answered Lady Throckmorton. "Only innocent. But I can tell you all about Priscilla in a dozen words. Priscilla is a modern Sappho. Priscilla is an elderly young lady, who never was a girl—Priscilla is my poor Denis Oglethorpe's *fiancee*."

"Oh!" said Theodora.

Her august relative drew her rich silk skirts a little farther away from the heat of the fire, and frowned slightly; but not at Theodora—at Priscilla, in her character of *fiancee*.

"Yes," she went on. "And I think you would agree with me in saying poor Denis Oglethorpe, if you could see Priscilla."

"Is she ugly?" asked Theo, concisely.

"No," sharply. "I wish she was; but at twenty-two she is elderly, as I said just now—and she never was anything else. She was elderly when they were engaged, five years ago."

"But why—why didn't they get married five years ago, if they were engaged?"

"Because they were too poor," Lady Throckmorton explained; "because Denis was only a poor young journalist, scribbling night and day, and scarcely earning his bread and butter."

"Is he poor now?" ventured Theo again.

"No," was the answer. "I wish he was, if it would save him from the Gowers. As it is, I suppose, if nothing happens to prevent it, he will marry Priscilla before the year is out. Not that it is any business of mine, but that I am rather fond of him—very fond of him, I might say, and I was once engaged to his father."

Theo barely restrained an ejaculation. Here was another romance—and she was so fond of romances. Pamela's love-story had been a great source of delight to her; but if Mr. Oglethorpe's father had been anything like that gentleman himself, what a delightful affair Lady Throckmorton's love-story must have been! The comfortable figure in the arm-chair at her side caught a glow of the faint halo that surrounded poor Pam; but in this case the glow had a more roseate tinge, and was altogether free from the funereal gray that in Pamela always gave Theo a sense of sympathizing discomfort.

The next day she wrote to Pamela:

> "I have not had time yet to decide how I like Lady Throckmorton," she said. "She is very kind to me, and asks a good many questions. I think I am a little afraid of her; but perhaps that is because I do not know her very well. One thing I am sure of, she doesn't like either Sir Dugald or his dog very much. We had a caller last night—a gentleman. A Mr. Denis Oglethorpe, who is a very great favorite of Lady Throckmorton.

He is very handsome, indeed. I never saw any one at all like him before—any one half so handsome and self-possessed. I liked him very much because he talked so well, and was so witty. I had on the gray satin when he came, and the train hung beautifully. I am glad we made it with a train, Pamela. I think I shall wear the purple cloth to-night, as Lady Throckmorton said that perhaps he might drop in again, and he knows so many grand people, that I should like to look nice. There seems to be a queer sort of friendship between aunt and himself, though somehow I fancied he did not care much about what she said to him. He is engaged to be married to a very accomplished young lady, and has been for several years; but they were both too poor to be married until now. The young lady's name is Priscilla Gower; and Lady Throckmorton does not like her, which seems very strange to me. She is as poor as we are, I should imagine, for she gives French and Latin lessons, and lives in a shabby house. But I don't think that is the reason Lady Throckmorton does not like her. I believe it is because she thinks she is not suited to Mr. Oglethorpe. I hope she is mistaken, for Mr. Oglethorpe is very nice indeed, and very clever. He is a journalist, and has written a book of beautiful poetry. I found the volume this morning, and have been reading it all day. I think it is lovely; but Lady Throckmorton says he wrote it when he was very young, and makes fun of it now. I don't think he ought to, I am sure. I shall buy a copy before I return, and bring it home to show you. I will write to mamma in a day or so. With kisses and love, and a hundred thanks again for the dresses, I remain, my dearest Pamela, your loving and grateful,

"THEO."

CHAPTER III.

THE MEETING.

But Denis Oglethorpe did not appear again for several days. Perhaps business detained him; perhaps he went oftener to see Priscilla. At any rate, he did not call again until the end of the week.

Lady Throckmorton was in her private room when he came, and as he made his entrance with as little ceremony as usual, he ran in upon Theodora. Now, to tell the truth, he had, until this moment, forgotten all about that young person's very existence. He saw so many pretty girls in a day's round, and he was so often too busy to notice half of them—though he was an admirer of pretty girls—that it was nothing new to see one and forget her, until chance threw them together again. Of course, he had noticed Theodora North that first night. How could a man help noticing her? And the something beautifully over-awed and bashfully curious in her lovely, uncommon eyes, had half amused him. And yet, until this moment, he had forgotten her, with the assistance of proofs, and printers, and Priscilla.

But when, after running lightly up the stair-case, he opened the drawing-room door, and saw a tall, lovely figure in a closely-fitting dress of purple cloth, bending over Sabre, and stroking his huge, tawny head with her supple little tender hand, he remembered.

"Ah, yes!" he exclaimed, in an admiring aside. "To be sure; I had forgotten Theodora."

But Theodora had not forgotten him. The moment she saw him she stood up blushing, and with a light in her eyes. It was odd how un-English she looked, and yet how thoroughly English she was in that delicious, uncomfortable trick of blushing vividly upon all occasions. She was quite unconscious of the fact that the purple cloth was so becoming, and that its sweep of straight, heavy folds made her as stately as some Rajah's dark-eyed daughter. She did not feel stately at all; she only felt somewhat

confused, and rather glad that Mr. Denis Oglethorpe had surprised her by coming again. How Mr. Denis Oglethorpe would have smiled if he had known what an innocent commotion his simple presence created!

"Lady Throckmorton is up-stairs reading," she explained. "I will go and tell her you are here." There were no bells in the house at Downport, and no servants to answer if any one had rang one, and, very naturally, Theo forgot she was not at Downport.

"Excuse me. No," said Mr. Denis Oglethorpe. "I would not disturb her on any account; and, besides, I know she will be down directly. She never reads late in the evening. This is a very handsome dog, Miss North."

"Very handsome, indeed," was Theo's reply. "Come here, Sabre."

Sabre stalked majestically to her side, and laid his head upon her knee. Theo stroked him softly, raising her eyes quite seriously to Mr. Oglethorpe's face.

"He reminds me of Sir Dugald himself," she said.

Mr. Denis Oglethorpe smiled faintly. He was not very fond of Sir Dugald, and the perfect gravity and *naivete* with which this pretty, unsophisticated young sultana had made her comment had amounted to a very excellent joke.

"Does he?" he returned, as quietly as possible, and then his glance meeting Theo's, she broke into a little burst of horror-stricken self-reproach.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "I oughtn't to have said that, ought I? I forgot how rude it would sound; but, indeed, I only meant that Sabre was so slow and heavy, and—and so indifferent to people, somehow. I don't think he cares about being liked at all."

She was so abashed at her blunder, that she looked absolutely imploring, and Mr. Denis Oglethorpe smiled again. He felt inclined to make friends with Theodora.

"There is a little girl staying at Lady Throckmorton's," he had said to Priscilla. "A relative of hers. A pretty creature, too, Priscilla, for a bread-and-butter Miss."

But just at this moment, he thought better of the matter. What tender, speechful eyes she had! He was aroused to a recognition of their beauty all at once. What contour there was in the turn of arm and shoulder under the close-fitting purple cloth! He was artistically thankful that there was no other trimming of the straight bodice than the line of buttons that descended from the full white ruff of swansdown at her throat, to her delicate, trim waist. Her unconscious stateliness of girlish form, and the conscious shyness of her manner, were the loveliest inconsistency in the world.

"Oh, I shall not tell Sir Dugald," he said to her, good-humoredly. "Besides, I think the comparison an excellent one. I don't know anything in London so like Sir Dugald as Sir Dugald's dog."

Theodora stroked Sabre, apologetically, but could scarcely find courage to speak. She had stood somewhat in awe of Mr. Denis Oglethorpe, even at first, and her discomfort was rapidly increasing. He must think her dreadfully stupid, though he was good-humored enough to make light of her silly speech. Certainly Priscilla never made such a silly speech in her life; but then, how could one teach French and Latin, and be anything but ponderously discreet?

Mr. Denis Oglethorpe was not thinking of Priscilla's wisdom, however; he was thinking of Theodora North; he was thinking that he must have been very blind not to have seen before that his friend's niece was a beauty of the first water, young as she was. But he had been tired and fagged out, he remembered, on the first occasion of their meeting—too tired to think of anything but his appointment at Broome street, and Priscilla's Greek grammar. And now in recognizing what he had before passed by, he was quite glad to find the girl so young and inexperienced—so modest, in a sweet way. It was easy, as well as proper enough, to talk to her unceremoniously without the trouble of being diffuse and complimentary. So he made himself agreeable, and Theodora listened until she quite forgot Sir Dugald, and only remembered Sabre, because his big heavy head was on her knee, and she was stroking it.

"And you were never in London before?" he said at length.

"No, sir," Theo answered. "This is the first time. I was never even out of Downport before."

"Then we must take you to see the lions," he said, "if Lady Throckmorton will let us, Miss Theodora. I wonder if she would let us? If she would, I have a lady friend who knows them all, from the grisliest, downward, and I know she would like to help me to exhibit them to you. How should you like that?"

"Better than anything in the world," glowing with delighted surprise. "If it wouldn't be too much trouble," she added, quite apologetically.

Mr. Denis Oglethorpe smiled.

"It would be simply delightful," he said. "I should like it better than anything in the world, too. We will appeal to Lady Throckmorton."

"When Priscilla was in London—" Theodora was beginning a minute later, when the handsome face changed suddenly as her companion turned upon her in evident surprise.

"Priscilla?" he repeated, after her.

"How stupid I am!" she ejaculated, distressedly. "I meant to say Pamela. My eldest sister's name is Pamela, and—and—"

"And you said Priscilla by mistake," interposed Oglethorpe, with a sudden accession of gravity. "Priscilla is a little like Pamela."

It needed nothing more than this simple slip of Theodora North's tongue to assure him that Lady Throckmorton had been telling her the story of his engagement to Miss Gower, and, as might be anticipated, he was not as devoutly grateful to her ladyship as he might have been. He was careless to a fault in some things, and punctilious to a fault in others; and he was very punctilious about Priscilla Gower. He was not an ardent lover, but he was a conscientiously honorable one, and, apart from his respect for his betrothed, he was very impatient of interference with his affairs; and my lady was not chary of interfering when the fancy seized her. It roused his pride to think how liberally he must have been discussed, and, consequently, when Lady Throckmorton joined them, he was not in the

most amiable of moods. But he managed to end his conversation with Theo unconstrainedly enough. He even gained her ladyship's consent to their plan. It was curiously plain how they both appeared to agree in thinking her a child, and treating her as one. Not that Theo cared about that. She had been so used to Pamela, that she would have felt half afraid of being treated with any greater ceremony; but still she could clearly understand that Mr. Oglethorpe did not speak to her as he would have spoken to Miss Gower. But free from any touch of light gallantry as his manner toward the girl was, Denis Oglethorpe did not forget her this night. On the contrary, he remembered her very distinctly, and had in his mind a very exact mental representation of her purple robe, soft white ruff, and all, as he buttoned up his paletot over his chest in walking homeward. But he thought of her carelessly and honestly enough, as a beautiful young creature years behind him in experience, and utterly beyond him in all possibility of any sentimental fancy.

The friendship existing between Lady Throckmorton and this young man was a queer, inconsistent sentiment enough, and yet was a friendship, and a mature one. The two had encountered each other some years ago, when Denis had been by no means in his palmiest days. In fact, my lady had picked him up when he stood in sore need of friends, and Oglethorpe never forgot a favor. He never forgot to be grateful to Lady Throckmorton; and so, despite the wide difference between their respective ages and positions, their mutual liking had ripened into a familiarity of relationship which made them more like elder sister and younger brother than anything else. Oglethorpe, junior, was pretty much what Oglethorpe, senior, had been, and notwithstanding her practical views, Lady Throckmorton liked him none the worse for it. She petted and patronized him, questioned and advised him, and if he did not please her, rated him roundly without the slightest compunction. In fact, she was a woman of caprices even at sixty-five, and Denis Oglethorpe was one of her caprices.

And, in like manner, Theodora North became another of them. Finding her tractable, she became quite fond of her, in her own way, and was at least generous to lavishness in her treatment of her.

"You are very handsome, indeed, Theodora," she said to her a few days after her arrival. "Of course, you know that—ten times handsomer than

ever poor Pamela could have been. Your figure is perfect, and you have eyes like a Syrian, instead of a commonplace English woman. I am going to give you a rose-pink satin dress. Rose-pink is just your shade, and some day, when we go out together, I will lend you some of my diamonds."

After this whimsical manner she lavished presents upon her whenever she had a new fancy. In truth, her generosity was constitutional, and she had been generous enough toward Pamela, but she had never been so extravagant as she was with Theodora. Theodora was an actual beauty, of an uncommon type, in the face of her ignorance of manners and customs. Pamela had never, at her best, been more than a delicately pretty girl.

In the meantime, Denis Oglethorpe made friendly calls as usual, and always meeting Theodora, found her very pleasant to talk to and look at. He found out her enthusiastic admiration for the poetic effusions of his youth, and in consideration thereof, good-humoredly presented her with a copy of the volume, with some very witty verses written on the fly-leaf in a flourishing hand. It was worth while to amuse Theodora, she was so pretty and unassuming in her delight at his carelessly-amiable efforts for her entertainment. She was only a mere child after all at sixteen, with Downport in the background; so he felt quite honestly at ease in being attentive to her girlish requirements. Better that he should amuse her than that she should be left to the mercy of men who would perhaps have the execrable taste to spoil her pretty childish ways with flattery.

"Don't let all these fine people and fine speeches turn your head, Theodora," he would say, in a tone that might either have been jest or earnest. "They spoiled me in my infancy, and my unfortunate experience causes me to warn you."

But whether he jested or not, Theo was always inclined to listen to him with some degree of serious belief. She took his advice when it was proffered, and regarded his wisdom as the wisdom of an oracle. Who should know better than he what was right? His indifference to the rule of opinion could only be the result of conscious perfection, and his careless satires were to her the most brilliant of witticisms. He paid her his first compliment the night the rose-colored satin-dress came home.

They were going to see Faust together with Lady Throckmorton, and she had finished dressing early, and came down to the drawing-room, and there Denis found her when he came up-stairs—the thick, lustrous folds of satin billowing upon the carpet around her feet, something white, and soft, and heavy wrapped about her.

He was conscious of a faint shock of delight on first beholding her. He had just left Priscilla, pale and heavy-eyed, in dun-colored merino, poring over a Greek dictionary, and the sudden entering the bright room, and finding himself facing Theodora North in rose-colored satin, was a little like electricity.

"Oh! it's Theodora, is it?" he said, slowly, when he recovered himself. "Thank you, Theodora."

"What for?" asked Theo, blushing.

"For the rose-colored satin," he returned, complacently. "It is so very becoming. You look like a sultana, my dear Theodora."

Theo looked up at him for a second, and then looked down. Much as she admired Mr. Denis Oglethorpe, she never quite comprehended him. He had such an eccentric fashion of being almost curt sometimes. She had seen him actually give a faint start when he entered, and she had not understood that, and now he had paid her a compliment, but with so much of something puzzling hidden in his quiet-sounding voice, that she did not understand that either—and he saw she did not.

"I have been making a fine speech to Theodora," he said to Lady Throckmorton, when she came in. "And she does not comprehend it in the least."

It was somewhat singular, Theo thought, that he should be so silent after this, for he was silent. He even seemed absent-minded, for some reason or other. He did not talk to her as much as usual, and she was quite sure he paid very little attention to Faust.

But during the final act she found that he was not looking at the stage at all; but was sitting in the shadow of the box-curtain watching herself. She had been deeply interested in Marguerite a minute before, and, in her

heart-touched pleasure, had leant upon the edge of the box, her whole face thrilled with excitement. But the steady gaze magnetized her, and drew her eyes round to the shadowy corner where Denis sat; and she positively turned with just such a start as he himself had given when Theodora North, in rose-colored satin, burst upon him, in such vivid, glowing contrast to Priscilla Gower, in dun merino.

"Oh!" she said, and though the little exclamation was scarcely more than an indrawn breath, Denis heard it, and came out of his corner to take a seat at her side, and lean over the box-edge also.

"What is it, Theodora?" he asked, in a low, clear voice. "Is it Marguerite?"

She looked at him in a little fright at herself. She did not know why she had exclaimed—she scarcely knew how; but when she met his unembarrassed eyes, she began to think that possibly it might be Marguerite. Indeed, a second later, she was quite sure it had been Marguerite.

"Yes—I think so," she faltered. "Poor Marguerite! If she could only have saved him?"

"How?" he asked.

"I don't—at least I scarcely know; but I think the author ought to have made her save him, someway. If—if she could have suffered something, or sacrificed something—"

"Would she have done it if she could?" commented Denis, languidly. He had quite recovered himself by this time.

"I would have done it if I had been Marguerite," Theo half whispered.

In his surprise he forgot his self-possession. He turned upon her suddenly, and meeting her sweet, world-ignorant eyes, felt the faint, pained shock once more, and strangely enough his first thought was a disconnected one of Priscilla Gower.

"You?" he said, the next moment. "Yes, I believe you would, Theodora."

He was sure she would, after that swift glance of his, and—Well, what a happy man he would be for whom this tender young Marguerite would suffer or be sacrificed. The idea had really never occurred to him before that Theodora North was nearly a woman; but it occurred to him now with all the greater force, because he had been so oblivious to the fact before.

He sat by her side until the curtain fell; but his silent mood seemed to have come upon him again. He was very much interested in Marguerite after this, Theo thought; but it is very much to be doubted whether he could have given a clear account of what was passing before his eyes upon the stage. He did not even go into the house with them when they returned; but as he stood upon the door-step, touching his hat in a final adieu, he was keenly alive to a consciousness of Theodora North at the head of the stair-case, with billows of glistening rose-pink satin lying on the rich carpet about her feet, as she half turned toward him to bid him good-night.

Bright as the future was, it left a sense of discomfort, he could not explain why. He dismissed the carriage, and walked down the street, feeling fairly depressed in spirits.

He had, perhaps, never given the girl a thought before, unless when chance had thrown them together, and even then his thoughts had been common admiring ones. She had pleased him, and he had tried to amuse her in a careless, well-meant fashion, though he had never made fine speeches to her, as nine men out of ten would have done. He had been so used to Priscilla, that it never occurred to him that a girl so young as this one could be a woman. And, after all, his blindness had not been the result of any frivolous lack of thought. A sharp experience had made him as thoroughly a man of the world as a man may be; but it had not made him callous or indifferent to the beauties of life. No one would ever have called him emotional, or prone to enthusiasms of a weak kind, and yet he was by no means hard of heart. He had quiet fancies of his own about people and things, and many of these reticent, rarely-expressed ideas were reverent, chivalrous ones of women. The opposing force of a whole world could never have shaken his faith in Priscilla Gower, or touched his respect for her; but though, perhaps, he had never understood it so, he had never felt very enthusiastically concerning her. Truly, Priscilla Gower and enthusiasm were not in accordance with each other. Chance had thrown

them together when both were very young, and propinquity did the rest. Propinquity is the strongest of agents in a love affair, and in Denis Oglethorpe's love affair, propinquity had accomplished what nothing else would have been likely to have done. The desperate young scribbler of twenty years had been the lodger of the elder Miss Gower, and Priscilla, aged seventeen, had brought in his frugal dinners to him, and receipted his modest bills on their weekly payment.

Priscilla at seventeen, silent, practical, grave and handsome, had, perhaps, softened unconsciously at the sight of his often pale face—he worked so hard and so far into the night; when at length they became friends, Priscilla gravely, and without any hesitation, volunteered to help him. She could copy well and clearly, and he could come into her aunt's room—it would save fires. So she helped him calmly and decorously, bending her almost austerely-handsome young head over his papers for hours on the long winter nights. It is easy to guess how the matter terminated. If ever he won success he determined to give it to Priscilla—and so he told her. He had never wavered in his faith for a second since, though he had encountered many beautiful and womanly women. He had worked steadily for her sake, and shielded her from every care that it lay within his power to lighten. He was not old Miss Elizabeth Gower's lodger now—he was her niece's husband in perspective. He was to marry Priscilla Gower in eight months. This was why Theodora North, in glistening rose-pink satin, sent him home confronting a suddenly-raised spirit of pain. Twice, in one night, he had found himself feeling toward Theodora North as he had never felt toward Priscilla Gower in his life. Twice, in one night, he had turned his eyes upon this girl of sixteen, and suffered a sudden shock of enthusiasm, or something like it. He was startled and discomfited. She had no right to win such admiration from him—he had no right to give it.

But as his walk in the night-air cooled him, it cooled his ardor of self-examination somewhat. His discontent was modified by the time he reached his own door, and took his latch-key out of his pocket. The face that had looked down upon him beneath the light at the head of the stair-case, had faded into less striking color—it was only a girl's face again. He was on better terms with himself, and his weakness seemed less formidable.

"I will keep my promise to-morrow," he said, "and Priscilla shall go with us. Poor Priscilla!—poor girl! Rose-pink satin would scarcely be in good taste in Broome street."

The promise he had made was nothing more than a ratification of the old one. They were to see the lions together, and Priscilla was to guide them.

And when the morrow came, he found it, after all, safe enough, and an easy enough matter, to tuck Theodora's small, gloved hand under his arm, when they set out on their tour of investigation and discovery. The girl was pretty enough, too, in her soft, black merino—her "best" dress in Downport—but she was not dazzling. The little round, black-plumed hat was becoming also; but in his now more prosaic mood, he could stand that, too, pretty as it was in an innocent, unconsciously-coquettish way. Theo was never coquettish herself in the slightest degree. She was not world-wise enough for that yet. But she was quite exhilarating to-day; so glad to be out even in the London fog of November; so glad to be taken lion-hunting; so delighted with the shops and their gay windows; so ready to let her young tongue run on in a gay stream of chatter, altogether so bright, and pretty, and joyous, that her escort was fain to be delighted too.

"Guess where we are going to first?" said he. (He had not before openly spoken of Priscilla to her.)

She glanced up into his face, brightly. She remembered what he had told her about his lady friend.

"I don't exactly know the name of the place," she said; "but I think I know the name of the person we are going to see."

"Do you?" was his reply. "Then say it to me—let me hear it."

"Miss Gower," she answered, softly, in a pretty reverence for him. "Miss Priscilla Gower."

He nodded, slightly, with a curious mixture of expressions in his face.

"Yes," he said. "Miss Gower, or rather Miss Priscilla Gower, as you say. Number twenty-three, Broome street; and Broome street is not a fashionable locality, my dear Theodora."

"Isn't it?" queried Theo. "Why not?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ask Lady Throckmorton," he said. "But do you know who Miss Priscilla Gower is, Theodora?"

Her bright eyes crept up to his, half-timidly; but she said nothing, so he continued.

"Miss Priscilla Gower is the young lady to whom I am to be married next July. Did you know that?"

"Yes," answered Theo, looking actually pleased, and blushing beautifully as he looked down at her. "But I am very much obliged to you for telling me, Mr. Oglethorpe."

"Why?" he asked. It was very preposterous, that even though his mood was so prosaic and paternal a one, he was absurdly, vacantly sensible of feeling some uneasiness at the brightness of her upturned face. For pity's sake, why was it that he was impelled to such a puerile weakness—such a vanity, as he sternly called it.

"Because," returned Theo, "it makes me feel as if—I mean it makes me happy to think you trust me enough to tell me about what has made you happy. I hope—oh! I do hope Miss Priscilla Gower will like me."

He had been looking straight before him while she spoke, but this brought his eyes to hers again, and to her face—bright, appealing, upturned—and he found himself absolutely obliged to steady himself with a jesting speech.

"My dearest Theodora," he said. "Miss Priscilla Gower could not possibly help it."

Comforting as this assurance was to her, it must be confessed she found herself somewhat over-awed on reaching Broome street, and being taken into the tiny, dwarfed-looking parlor of number twenty-three; Miss Elizabeth Gower herself was there, in her company-cap, and long-cherished company-dress of snuff-colored satin. There were not many shades of difference in either her snuff-colored gown, or her snuff-colored

skin, or her neat, snuff-colored false-front, Theo fancied, but she was not at all afraid of her. She was a trifle afraid of Miss Priscilla. Miss Priscilla was sitting at the table reading when they entered, and as she rose to greet them, holding her book in one hand, the thought entered Theo's mind that she could comprehend dimly why Lady Throckmorton disliked her, and thought her unsuited to Denis Oglethorpe. There was an absence of anything girl-like in her fine, ivory-pale face, somehow, though it was a young face and a handsome face, at whose fine lines and clear contour even a connoisseur could not have caviled. Its long almond-shaped, agate-gray eyes, black-fringed and lustrous as they were, still were silent eyes—they did not speak even to Denis Oglethorpe.

"I am glad you have come," she said, simply, extending her hand in acknowledgment of Denis's introduction. The quietness of this greeting speech was a fair sample of all her manner. It would have been sheerly impossible to expect anything like effusiveness from Priscilla Gower. The most sanguine and empty-headed of mortals would never have looked for it in her. She was constitutionally unenthusiastic, if such a thing may be.

But she was gravely curious in this case concerning Theodora North. The fact that Denis had spoken of her admiringly was sufficient to arouse in her mind an interest in this young creature, who was at once, and so inconsistently, beautiful, timid, and regal, without consciousness.

"Three years more will make her something wonderful, as far as beauty is concerned," he had said; and, accordingly, she had felt some slight pleasure in the anticipation of seeing her.

Yet Theo had some faint misgivings during the day as to whether Miss Priscilla Gower would like her or not. She was at first even inclined to fear that she would not, being so very handsome, and grave, and womanly. But toward the end of their journeying together, she felt more hopeful. Reticent as she was, Priscilla Gower was a very charming young person. She talked well, and with much clear, calm sense; she laughed musically when she laughed at all, and could make very telling, caustic speeches when occasion required; but still it was singular what a wide difference the difference of six years made in the two girls. As Lady Throckmorton had said, it was not a matter of age. At twenty-two Theodora North would

overflow with youth as joyously as she did now at seventeen; at seventeen Priscilla Gower had assisted her maiden aunt's lodger to copy his manuscript with as mature a gravity as she would have displayed to-day.

"I hope," said Theodora, when, after their sight-seeing was over, she stood on the pavement before the door in Broome street, her nice little hand on Denis Oglethorpe's arm, "I hope you will let me come to see you again, Miss Gower."

Priscilla, standing upon the door-step, smiled down on her blooming girl's face, a smile that was a little like moonlight. All Priscilla's smiles were like moonlight. Theo's had a delicious glow of the sun.

"Yes," she said, in her practical manner. "It will please me very much to see you, Miss Theodora. Come as often as you can spare the time."

She watched the two as they walked down the street together, Theo's black feather glossy in the gaslight, as it drooped its long end against Oglethorpe's coat, and as she watched them, she noticed even this trifle of the feather, and the trifling fact that though Theo was almost regal in girlish height, she was not much taller than her companion's shoulder. It was strange, she thought afterward, that she should have done so; but even while thinking it strange in the afterward that came to her, she remembered it all as distinctly as ever, and knew that to the last day of her life she would never quite forget the quiet of the narrow, dreary street, the yellow light of the gas-lamps, and the two figures walking away into the shadow, with their backs toward her, the girl holding Denis Oglethorpe's arm, and the glossy feather in her black hat drooping its tip upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER IV.

THEO'S DIARY.

Up-stairs, in a sacred corner of the chamber Lady Throckmorton had apportioned to her, Theodora North kept her diary. Not a solid, long-winded diary, full of creditable reflections upon the day's events, but, on the contrary, a harmless little book enough—a pretty little book, bound in pink and gold, and much ornamented about the corners, and greatly embellished with filagree clasps. Lady Throckmorton had given it to her because she admired it, and, in a very natural enthusiasm, she had made a diary of it. And here are the entries first recorded in its gilt-edged pages:

December 7.—Mr. Oglethorpe was so kind as to remember his promise about showing me the lions. Enjoyed myself very much. Miss Priscilla Gower went with us. She is very dignified, or something; but I think I like her. I am sure I like her, so I will go to see her again. I wonder how it is she reminds me of Pamela without being like Pamela at all. Poor Pam always so sharp in her ways, and I do not think Miss Gower ever could speak sharply at all. And yet she reminds me of Pam.

December 14.—Went to the theatre again with Lady Throckmorton and Mr. Oglethorpe. I wonder if the rose-pink satin is not becoming to me? I thought it was; but before I went up-stairs to dress, Mr. Oglethorpe said to me, "Don't put on the rose-pink satin, Theodora." I am sorry that he does not think it is pretty. Wore a thin, white-muslin dress, and dear, dearest old Pamela's beautiful sapphires. The muslin had a long train.

December 18.—Mr. Oglethorpe came to-night with a kind of message from Miss Gower.

From these innocent extracts, persons of an unlimited experience might draw serious conclusions; but when she made said entries, kneeling before her toilet-table, each night, our dear Theodora thought nothing about them at all. She had nothing else in particular to write about at present, so, in

default of finding a better subject, she jotted down guileless remembrances of Denis Oglethorpe and the length of her trains.

But one memorable evening, on going into the sitting-room, with the pink and gold volume in her hand, she encountered Sir Dugald, who seemed to be in an extraordinary frame of mind, and withal nothing loth to meet her.

"What pretty book have you there, Theodora?" he asked, in his usual amiably uncivilized manner.

"It is my diary," Theo answered. "Lady Throckmorton gave it to me. I put things down in it."

"Oh, oh!" was the reply, taking hold of both Sabre's ears, and chuckling. "Put things down, do you? What sort of things do you put down, eh, pretty Theodora? Lovers, eh? Literary men, eh?"

Theo grew pink all over—pink as to cheeks, pink as to slim white throat, even pink as to small ears. She was almost frightened, and her fright was of a kind such as she had never experienced before. But it was not Sir Dugald she was afraid of—she was used to him. It was something new of which she had never thought until this very instant.

"Literary men, eh?" Sir Dugald went on. "Do you put down what their names are, and what they do, and how they make mistakes, and take the wrong young lady to see Norma, and Faust and Il Trovatore? Il Trovatore's a nice opera; Theo and Leonora sounds something like Theodora. It doesn't sound anything like Priscilla, does it? The devil fly away with Priscilla, I say. Priscilla isn't musical, is it, Leonora?"

Once having freed herself from him, which was by no means an easy matter, Theo flew up-stairs, tremulous, breathless, flushed. She did not stop to think. She had seen the drawing-room empty and unlighted, save by a dull fire, on her way down-stairs, so she turned to the drawing-room. She had been conscious of nothing but Sir Dugald, so she had not heard the hall-door open; and, not having heard the hall-door open, had, of course, not heard Denis Oglethorpe come in. So, in running into the fire-lit room, she broke in upon that gentleman, who was standing in the shadow, and it must be confessed was rather startled by her sudden entrance and curiously-excited face.

He stopped her short, however, collectedly enough.

"What is the matter, Theodora?" he demanded.

She slipped down upon a footstool, all in a flutter, when she saw him, she was so shaken; and then, in her sudden abasement and breathless tremor, gave vent to a piteous little half-sob, though she was terribly ashamed of it.

"I—I don't know," she answered him. "It's—it's nothing at all." But he knew better than that, and guessing very shrewdly that he was not wholly unconnected with the matter himself, questioned her as closely as was consistent with delicacy, and, in the end, after some diplomacy, and a few more of surprised, piteous, little unwilling half-sobs, gleaned a great deal of the truth from her.

"It was only—only something Sir Dugald said about you and Miss Gower, and—and something about me," she added, desperately.

"Oh!" he said, looking so composed about it that the very sight of his composure calmed her, and made her begin to think she had seen a mountain in a mole-hill. "Sir Dugald? Only Sir Dugald? What did he say, may I ask, as it—it is about myself and Miss Gower?"

Of course he might ask, but the difficulty lay in gaining any definite answer. Theodora blushed, and then actually turned a little pale, looking wondrously abased in her uncalled-for confusion; but she was not at all coherent in her explanations, which were really not meant for explanations at all.

"Il Trovatore was so beautiful!" she burst out, finally; "and so was Faust; and I had never been to the opera in all my life before, and, of course—" blushing and palpitating, but still looking at him without a shade of falsehood in her innocent, straightforward eyes; "of course, I couldn't. How could I be so silly, and vain, and presuming, as to think of—of—of —"

She stopped here, as might be expected, and, if the room had been light enough, she might have seen a shadow fall on Oglethorpe's face, as he prompted her.

"Of what?"

Her eyes fell. "Of what Sir Dugald said," she ended, in a troubled half-whisper.

There was a slight pause, in which both pairs of eyes looked down—Theodora's upon the rug of tiger-skin at her feet, Oglethorpe's at Theodora herself. They were treading upon dangerous ground, he knew, and yet in the midst of his fierce anger at his weakness, he was conscious of a regret—a contemptible regret, he told himself—that the eyes she had raised to his own a moment ago, had been so very clear and guilelessly honest in their accordance with the declaration her lips had made.

"But, my dear Theodora," he at length broke the silence by saying, carelessly, "why should we trouble ourselves about that elderly Goth, or Vandal, if you choose—Sir Dugald? Who does trouble themselves about Sir Dugald, and his amiably ponderous jocoseness? Not Lady Throckmorton, I am sure; not society in general, you must know; consequently, let us treat Sir Dugald with silent contempt, in a glorious consciousness of our own spotless innocence."

He was half uneasy under his satirical indifference; though he was so accustomed to conceal his thoughts under indifference and satire, he was scarcely sure enough of himself at this minute; but, despite this, he carried out the assumed mood pretty well.

"We have no need to be afraid of Sir Dugald's Vandalism, if we have no fear of ourselves, and, considering, as you so very justly observed, that it is quite impossible for us to be silly, and vain, and presuming toward each other. I think we must be quite safe. I believe you said it would be impossible, Theodora?"

Just one breath's space, and Theodora North looked up at him, as it were through the influence of an electric flash of recognition. There was a wild, sweet, troubled color on her cheeks, and her lips were trembling; her whole face seemed to tremble; her very eyes had a varying tremulous glow.

"Quite impossible, wasn't it, Theodora?" he repeated, and though he had meant it for nothing more than a careless, daring speech, his voice

changed in defiance of him, and altered, or seemed to alter, both words and their meaning. What, in the name of madness, he would have been rash enough to say next, in response to the tremor of light and color in the upturned face, it would be hard to say, for here he was stopped, as it were, by Fortune herself.

Fortune came in the form of Lady Throckmorton, fresh from Trollope's last, and in a communicative mood.

"Ah! You are here, Denis, and you, too, Theodora? Why are you sitting in the dark?" And, as she bent over to touch the bell, Theodora rose from her footstool to make way for her—rose with a little sigh, as if she had just been awakened from a dream which was neither happy nor sad.

It was very plainly Lady Throckmorton's business to see, and, seeing, understand the affairs of her inexperienced young relative; but if Lady Throckmorton understood that Theodora North was unconsciously endangering the peace of her girlish heart, Lady Throckmorton was very silent, or very indifferent about the matter. But she was not moulded after the manner of the stern female guardians usually celebrated in love stories. She was not mercenary, and she was by no means authoritative. She had sent for Theo with the intention of extending to her the worldly assistance she had extended to Pamela, and, beyond that, the matter lay in the girl's own hands. Lady Throckmorton had no high views for her in particular; she wanted to see her enjoy herself as much as possible until the termination of her visit, in whatever manner it terminated, whether matrimonially or otherwise. Besides, she was not so young as she had been in Pamela's time, and, consequently, though she was reasonably fond of her handsome niece, and more than usually generous toward her, she was inclined to let her follow her own devices. For herself, she had her luxurious little retiring-room, with its luxurious fires and lounges; and after these, or rather with these, came an abundance of novels, and the perfect, creamy chocolate her French cook made such a masterpiece of—novels and chocolate standing as elderly and refined dissipations. And not being troubled with any very strict ideas of right or wrong, it would, by no means, have annoyed her ladyship to know that her handsome Theodora had out-generalled her pet grievance, Priscilla Gower. Why should not

Priscilla Gower be out-generalled, and why should not Denis marry some one who was as much better suited to him, as Theodora North plainly was?

"Tut! tut!" she said to Sir Dugald. "Why shouldn't they be married to each other? It would be better than Priscilla Gower, if Theodora had nothing but Pam's gray satin for her bridal trousseau."

So Theo was left to herself, and having no confidant but the pink and gold journal, gradually began to trust to its page some very troubled reflections. It had not occurred to her that she could possibly be guilty in admiring Mr. Denis Oglethorpe so much as she did, and in feeling so glad when he came, and so sorry when he went away. She had not thought that it was because he was sitting near her, and talking to her between the acts; that Il Trovatore and Faust had been so thrillingly beautiful and tender. And this was quite true, even though she had not begun to comprehend it as yet.

She had no right to feel anxious about him; and yet, when, after having committed himself in the rash manner chronicled, he did not make his appearance for nearly two weeks, she was troubled in no slight degree. Indeed, though the thought was scarcely defined, she had some unsophisticated misgivings as to whether Miss Priscilla Gower might not have been aroused to a sense of the wrongs done her through the medium of Il Trovatore, and so have laid an interdict upon his visits; but it was only Sir Dugald who had suggested this to her fancy.

But by the end of the two weeks, she grew tired of waiting, and the days were so very long, that at length, not without some slight compunction, she made up her mind to go and pay a guileless visit to Miss Priscilla Gower herself.

"I am going to see Miss Gower, aunt," she ventured to say one morning, at the breakfast table.

Sir Dugald looked up from his huge slice of broiled venison, clumsily jocose after his customary agreeable manner.

"What's that, Leonora?" he said. "Going to see the stern vestal, are you? Priscilla, eh?"

Lady Throckmorton shrugged her shoulders in an indifferent sarcasm. She was often both sarcastic and indifferent in her manner toward Sir Dugald.

"Theo's in-goings and out-goings are scarcely our business, so long as she enjoys herself," she said. "Present my regards to the Miss Gowers, my dear, and say I regret that my health does not permit me to accompany you."

A polite fiction by the way, as my lady was looking her best. It was only upon state occasions, and solely on Denis' account, that she ever submitted to Broome street, albeit the fat, gray horses, and fat gray coachman did occasionally recognize the existence of that remote locality.

It so happened that, as they drew up before Miss Gower's modest door this morning, the modest door in question opened, and Denis Oglethorpe himself came out, and, of course, caught sight of Theodora North, who had just bent forward to pull the check-string, and so gave him a full view of her charming *reante*, un-English face, and, in her pleasure at seeing him, that young lady forgot both herself and Sir Dugald, and exclaimed aloud,

"Oh, Mr. Oglethorpe!" she cried out. "I am so glad—" and then stopped, in a confusion and trepidation absolutely brilliant.

He came to the window, and looked in at her.

"Are you coming to see Priscilla?" he said.

"Lady Throckmorton said I might," she answered, the warmth in her face chilled by his unenthusiastic though kindly tone. She did not know what a struggle it cost him to face her thus carelessly all at once.

He did not even open the carriage-door himself, but waited for the footman to do it.

"Priscilla will be glad to see you," he said, quietly. "I will go into the house again with you."

The dwarfed sitting-room looked very much as it had looked on Theo's first introduction to it; but on this occasion Miss Elizabeth was not arrayed in the snuff-colored satin; and when they entered, Priscilla was kneeling down upon the hearth-rug, straightening out an obstreperous fold in it.

She rose, collectedly, at once, and as her face turned toward them, Theo was struck with some fancy of its being a shade paler than it had been the last time she had seen it. But her manner was not changed in the least, and she welcomed her visitor with grave cordiality. Poor little snuff-colored Miss Elizabeth was delighted. She was getting very fond of company in her old age, and had taken a great fancy to Theodora North.

"Send the carriage away, and stay with us until evening, Miss Theodora," she fluttered in wild, old-maidenly excitement. "Do stay, Miss Theodora, and I will show you how to do the octagon-stitch, as I promised the last time you were here. You remember how you admired it in that antimacassar I was making for Priscilla?"

Miss Elizabeth's chief delight and occupation was the making of miraculously-gorgeous mysteries for Priscilla; and Theo's modest eulogies of her last piece of work had won her admiration and regard at once. Consequently, under stress of Miss Elizabeth, the carriage was fain to depart, much to the abasement of the fat, gray coachman, who felt himself much dishonored in finding he was compelled, not only to pay majestic calls to Broome street, but to acknowledge the humiliating fact of friendly visits.

"We must have a fire in the best parlor, my dear," chirped Elizabeth, ecstatically, when Theo's hat and jacket were being carried out of the room. "Don't forget to tell Jane, Priscilla, and—" fumbling in her large side-pocket, "here's the key of the preserve-closet. Quince preserve, my dear, and white currant-jelly."

Theodora was reminded of Downport that day, in a hundred ways. The nice little company-dinner reminded her of it; the solitary little roast fowl and the preserves and puddings; but the company-dinners at Downport had always been detracted from by the sharp annoyance in Pam's face, and the general domestic bustle, and the total inadequacy of gravy and stuffing to the wants of the boys. She was particularly reminded of it by the ceremonious repairing to the fire in the front parlor, where everything was so orderly, and even the family portraits had the appearance of family portraits roused from a deep reverie to be surprised at an intrusion.

"My late lamented parents, my dear," said Miss Elizabeth, rubbing her spectacles, and admiringly regarding an owl-like, elderly gentleman, in an aggressive brown wig, and an equally owl-like lady, in a self-announcing false-front, embarrassingly suggestive of Miss Elizabeth's own. "My late lamented parents, at the respective ages of fifty and fifty-seven. My sister, Anastasia; my only brother, my sister-in-law, his wife; and my dear Priscilla, at seventeen years."

Theo turned from the others to look at this last with a deeper interest; remembered that it was when she was seventeen, that Priscilla had first met Denis Oglethorpe. It was a small picture, half life-size, and set in an oval frame of black walnut. Priscilla at seventeen had not been very different from Priscilla at twenty-two. She had a pale, handsome, ungirlish face—a Minerva face—steady, grave, handsome eyes, and a fine head, unadorned, save with a classic knot of black brown hair. The picture was not even younger-looking than Priscilla was now.

Miss Elizabeth regarded it in affectionate admiration of its beauty.

"My dear," she said to Theodora, "that is the most beautiful face in London, to my old eyes. It reminds me of my dear Anastasia in her youth. I was always glad my brother Benjamin's daughter was not like his wife. We were not fond of my brother Benjamin's wife. She was a very giddy young person, and very fond of gayety. She died of lung-fever, contracted through exposing herself one night at a military ball, in direct opposition to my brother Benjamin's wishes. She insisted upon wearing blue-satin slippers, and a low-necked dress."

"Oh, dear!" said Theodora, secretly conscious of a guilty sympathy for the giddy young person who ran counter to brother Benjamin's wishes, in the matter of military balls and blue-satin slippers.

"Yes, my love!" Miss Elizabeth proceeded. "And for that reason I was always glad to find that Priscilla was not at all like her. Priscilla and I have been very happy together, in our quiet way; she has been the best of dear, good girls to me. Indeed, I really don't know what I shall do when I must lose her, as of course you know I shall be obliged to, when she marries Mr. Denis Oglethorpe!"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Theo, and as she spoke, she felt a curious, startled glow flash over her. This was the first time an actual approach to the subject had been made in her presence.

"Yes, my dear!" said Miss Elizabeth again. "I shall feel the separation very deeply, but it must be, you know. They have waited so long for each other, that I should be a very wicked selfish old woman to throw any obstacle, even so slight a one as my own discomfort, in their way. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, madame," Theo faltered, very unsteadily, indeed.

But Miss Elizabeth did not notice any hesitation in her manner, and went on with her confidential chat, eulogizing Priscilla and her betrothed affectionately. Mr. Denis Oglethorpe would be a rich man some of these days, and then what a happy life must Priscilla's be—so young, so beautiful, so beloved. "Not that wealth brings happiness, my dear Miss Theodora. Riches are very deceitful, you know; but there is a great deal of solid comfort in a genteel sufficiency."

To all of which Theo acquiesced, modestly, inwardly wondering if she was very wrong in wishing that Oglethorpe had not left them quite so early.

The day passed pleasantly enough, however, in a quiet way. Miss Elizabeth was very affectionate and communicative, and told her a great many stories of Anastasia, and the late-lamented Benjamin, as they sat by the fire together, in the evening, and blundered over the octagon-stitch. It was an Afghan Miss Elizabeth was making now; and when at tea-time, Mr. Oglethorpe came, he found Theodora North sitting on the hearth, flushed with industrious anxiety, and thrown into reflected glow of brilliant Berlin wool, a beautiful young spider in a gorgeous Afghan web.

"I should like," she was saying as he entered, "to buy Pamela and the girls some nice little presents. What would you advise me to get, Miss Gower?"

She was very faithful to the shabby household at Downport. Her letters were never careless or behind time, and no one was ever neglected in the multiplicity of messages. She would be the most truthful and faithful of loving women a few years hence, this handsome Theodora. There was some reserve in her manner toward Denis this evening. She attended to

Miss Elizabeth's octagon-stitch, and left him to amuse Priscilla. He had not seemed very much pleased to see her in the morning, and besides, Priscilla was plainly his business. But when the carriage was announced, and she returned to the parlor, after an absence of a few minutes, drawing on her gloves, and buttoning her pretty jacket close up to her beautiful slender, dusky throat, Denis took his hat and accompanied her to the carriage. He did not wait for the footman this time; but, after assisting her to get in, closed the door himself, and leaned against the open window for a moment.

"I want you to deliver a message to Lady Throckmorton for me," he said. "May I trouble you, Theodora?"

She bent her head with an unpleasantly-quickened heart-beat. It was very foolish, of course, but she felt as if something painful was going to happen, and nothing on earth could prevent it.

"Business has unexpectedly called me away from London—from England," he explained, in a strange yet quite steady voice. "I am obliged to go to Belgium at once, and my affairs are in such a condition that I may be compelled to remain across the channel for some time. Be good enough to say to Lady Throckmorton that I regret deeply that I could not see her before going; but—but the news has been sudden, and my time is fully occupied; but I will write to her from my first stopping-place."

"I will tell her," said Theodora.

"Thank you," he replied, courteously, and then, after a short hesitation, began again, in the tone he used so often—the tone that might be jest or earnest. "And now, there is something else, a subject upon which I wish to ask your unbiased opinion, my dear Theodora, before I say good-bye. When a man finds himself in a danger with which he cannot combat, and remain human—in danger, where defeat means dishonor, do you not agree with me, that the safest plan that man can adopt is to run away?"

Her quickened heart might almost have been running a life-and-death race with her leaping pulse, but she answered him almost steadily.

"Yes," she said to him. "You are quite right. He had better go away."

"Thank you," he returned again. "Then you will give me your hand and wish me God-speed; and, perhaps—I say perhaps—you will answer me another question. This morning, when you spoke to me through the carriage window, you began to say something about being glad. Were you going to say—" He broke off here, sharply. "No!" he exclaimed. "I will not ask you."

"I was going to say that I was glad to see you," Theo interrupted, gravely. "I was glad to see you. And now, perhaps, you had better tell the coachman to drive on. I will deliver your message to Lady Throckmorton; and as I shall not see you again, unless I am here in July—of course you will come back then—good-bye, Mr. Oglethorpe."

She gave him her hand through the carriage-window, and, for a moment, he held it, to all appearance quite calm, as he looked down at the lovely face the flare of an adjacent gaslight revealed to him against a background of shadow.

"Good-bye," he said, and then released it. "Drive on," he called to the coachman, and in a moment more, he stood alone watching the carriage turn the corner.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEPARATION.

"Mr. Denis Oglethorpe has gone away. He will not come back again until July, when he is to marry Miss Gower."

This was the last entry recorded in the little pink-and-gold journal, and after it came a gap of months.

It was midnight after the memorable day spent in Broome street that the record was made, and having made it, Theodora North shut the book with a startled feeling that she had shut within its pages an unfinished page of her life.

It was a strange feeling to have come upon her so suddenly, and there was a strange kind of desperateness in its startling strength. It was startling; it had come upon her without a moment's warning, it seemed, and yet, if she had been conscious of it, there had been warning enough. Warning enough for an older woman—warning enough for Denis Oglethorpe; but it had not seemed warning to a girl of scarcely seventeen years. But she understood it now; she had understood it the moment he told her in that strained, steady voice that he was going away. She had delivered his message to Lady Throckmorton, and listened quietly to her wandering comments, answering them as best she could. She had waited patiently until Sir Dugald's barbarous eleven o'clock supper was over, and then she had gone to her room, stirred the fire, and dropped down upon the hearth-rug to think it over. She thought over it for a long time, her handsome eyes brooding over the red coals, but after about half an hour she spoke out aloud to the silence of the room.

"He loved me," she said. "He loved me—me. Poor Priscilla! Ah, poor Priscilla! How sorry I am for you."

She was far more sorry for Priscilla than she was for herself, though it was Priscilla who had won the lover, and herself who had lost him forever. She

cared for him so much more deeply than she realized as yet, that she would rather lose him, knowing he loved her, than win him feeling uncertain. The glow in her eyes died away in tears, but she was too young to realize despair or anything like it. The truth was that the curious enchantment of the day had not been altogether sad, and at seventeen one does not comprehend that fate can be wholly bitter, or that some turn in fortune is not in store for the future, however hopeless the present may seem.

In this mood the entry was made in the little journal, and having made it, Theodora North cried a little, hoped a little, and wondered guilelessly how matters could end with perfect justice to Priscilla Gower.

The household seemed rather quiet after the change. Mr. Denis Oglethorpe was a man to be missed under any circumstances—and Theo was not the only one who missed him. Lady Throckmorton missed him also, but she had the solace of her novels and her chocolate, which Theo had not. Novels had been delightful at Downport, when they were read in hourly fear of the tasks that always interfered to prevent any indulgence; but in those days, for some reason, they were not as satisfactory as they appeared once, and so being thrown on her own resources, she succumbed to the very natural girlish weakness of feeling a sort of fascination for Broome street. It was hard to resist Broome street, knowing that there must be news to be heard there, and so she gradually fell into the habit of paying visits, more to Miss Elizabeth Gower than to her niece. The elder Miss Gower was always communicative, and always ready to talk about her favorites, and to Theo, in her half-puzzled, half-sad frame of mind, this was a curious consolation. The two spent hours together, sometimes, in the tiny parlor, stumbling over Berlin wool difficulties, and now and then wandering to and fro, conversationally, from Priscilla to the octagon-stitch, and from the octagon-stitch to Denis.

Priscilla was prone to reserve, and rarely joined them in their talks; and, besides, she was so often busy, that if she had felt the inclination to do so, she had not time to indulge it. But she was even more silent than she had seemed at first, Theo thought, and she was sure her pale, handsome face was paler, though, of course, that was easily to be accounted for by her lover's absence.

She was a singular girl this Priscilla Gower. The first time Theo ever saw her display an interest in anybody, or in anything, was when she first heard Pamela's love-story mentioned.

She was sitting at work near them, when Theo chanced to mention Arthur Brunwalde, and, to her surprise, Priscilla looked up from her desk immediately.

"He was your sister's lover, was he not?" she said, with an abrupt interest in the subject.

"Yes," answered Theo; "but he died, you know."

Priscilla nodded.

"The week before their wedding-day," she said. "Mr. Oglethorpe told me so."

Theo answered in the affirmative again.

"And poor Pam could not forget him," she added, her usual tender reverence for poor Pam showing itself in her sorrowing voice. "She was very pretty then, and Lady Throckmorton was angry because she would not marry anybody else; but Pamela never cared for anybody else."

Priscilla got up from her chair, and, coming to the hearth, leaned against the low mantel, pen in hand. She looked down on Theodora North with a curious expression in her cold, handsome eyes.

"Is your sister like you?" she asked.

Her tone was such a strange one that Theo lifted her face with a faint, startled look.

"No," she replied, almost timidly. "Pamela is fairer than I am, and not so tall. We are not alike at all."

"I was not thinking of that," said Priscilla. "I was wondering if you were alike in disposition. I think I was wondering most whether you would be as faithful as Pamela."

"That is a strange question," Miss Elizabeth interposed. "Theodora has not been tried."

But Priscilla was looking straight at Theo's downcast eyes.

"But I think Theodora knows," she said, briefly. "Are you like your sister in that, Theodora? I remember hearing Mr. Oglethorpe say once you would be."

Theo dropped her ivory crochet-needle, and bent to pick it up, with a blurred vision and nervous fingers.

"I cannot tell," she said. "I am not old enough to know yet."

"You are seventeen," said Priscilla. "I knew at seventeen."

Theo recovered the needle, and reset it in her work to give herself time, and then she looked up and faced her questioner bravely, in a sort of desperateness.

"If I knew that I loved any one. If I had ever loved any one as Pamela loved Mr. Brunwalde, I should be like Pamela," she said. "I should never love any one else."

From that time she fancied that Priscilla Gower liked her better than she had done before; at any rate, she took more notice of her, though she was never effusive, of course.

She talked to her oftener, and seemed to listen while she talked, even though she was busy at the time. She said to her once that she would like to know Pamela; and, emboldened by this, Theo ventured to bring one of Pam's letters to read to her; and when she had read it, told the whole story of her sister's generosity in a little burst of enthusiastic love and gratitude that fairly melted tender-hearted old Miss Elizabeth to tears, and caused her to confide afterward to Theo the fact that she herself had felt the influence of the tender passion, in consequence of the blandishments of a single gentleman of uncertain age, whose performances upon the flute had been the means of winning her affections, but had unhappily resulted in his contracting a fatal cold while serenading on a damp evening.

"He used to play 'In a Cottage near a Wood,' my dear, most beautifully," said Miss Elizabeth, wild with pathos, "though I regret to say that, as we did not live in a musical neighborhood, the people next door did not appreciate it; the gentleman of the house even going so far as to say that he was not sorry when he died, as he did a few weeks after the cold settled on his dear weak lungs. He was the only lover I ever had, my dear Theodora, and his name was Elderberry, a very singular name, by the way, but he was a very talented man."

When Theo went into the little back bedroom that evening to put on her hat, Priscilla Gower went with her, and, as she stood before the dressing-table buttoning her sacque, she was somewhat puzzled by the expression on her companion's face. Priscilla had taken up her muff, and was stroking the white fur, her eyes downcast upon her hand as it moved to and fro, the ring upon its forefinger shining in the gaslight.

"I had a letter from Mr. Oglethorpe yesterday," Priscilla said, at last. "He is in Vienna now; he asked if you were well. To-night I shall answer him. Have you any message to send?"

"I?" said Theo. It seemed to her so strange a thing for Miss Priscilla Gower to say, that her pronoun was almost an interjection.

"I thought, perhaps," said Priscilla, quietly, "that a message from you would gratify him, if you had one to send."

Theo took up her gloves and began to draw them on, a sudden feeling of pain or discomfort striking her. It was a feeling scarcely defined enough to allow her to decide whether it was real pain or only discomfort.

"I do not think I have any message to send," she replied. "Thank you, Miss Priscilla."

She took her muff then, and went back to the parlor to kiss Miss Elizabeth, in a strange frame of mind. She was beginning to feel more strangely concerning Mr. Denis Oglethorpe, and it was Priscilla Gower who had stirred her heart. She found Lady Throckmorton waiting at home for her, to her surprise, in a new mood. She had that evening received a letter from Denis herself, and it had suggested an idea to her.

"I have been thinking, Theo," she said, "that we might take a run over the Channel ourselves. I have not been in Paris for four years, and I believe the change would do me good. The last time I visited the Spas, my health improved greatly."

It was just like her ladyship to become suddenly possessed of a whim, and to follow its lead on the spur of the moment. She was a woman of caprices, and her caprices always ruled the day, as this one did, to Theo's great astonishment. It seemed such a great undertaking to Theodora, this voyage of a few hours; but Lady Throckmorton regarded it as the lightest of matters. To her it was only the giving of a few orders, being uncomfortably sea-sick for a while, and then landing in Calais, with a waiting-woman who understood her business, and a man-servant who was accustomed to travelling. So when Theo broke into exclamations of pleasure and astonishment, she did not understand either her enthusiasm or her surprise.

"What," she said, "you like the idea, do you? Well, I think I have made up my mind about it. We could go next week, and I dare say we could reach Vienna before Denis Oglethorpe goes away."

Theo became suddenly silent. She gave vent to no further exclamations. She would almost have been willing to give up the pleasure of the journey after that. She was learning that it was best for her not to see Denis Oglethorpe again, and here it seemed that she must see him in spite of herself, even though she was conscientious enough to wish to do what was best, not so much because it was best for herself, as because it was just to Priscilla Gower. But Lady Throckmorton had come to a decision, and forthwith made her preparations. She even wrote to Vienna, and told Denis that they were coming, herself and Theodora North, and he must wait and meet them if possible.

It was a great trial to Theodora, this. She was actually girlish and sensitive enough to fancy that Mr. Denis Oglethorpe might imagine their intention to follow him was some fault of hers, and she was uncomfortable and nervous accordingly. She hoped he would have left Vienna before the letter reached him; she hoped he might go away in spite of it; she hoped it might never reach him at all. And yet, in spite of this, she experienced an almost passionately keen sense of disappointment when, on the day before their

departure, Lady Throckmorton received a letter from him regretting his inability to comply with her request, and announcing his immediate departure for some place whose name he did not mention. Business had called him away, and Lady Throckmorton, of course, knew what such business was, and how imperative its demands were.

"He might have waited," Theo said to herself, with an unexpected, inconsistent feeling of wretchedness. "I would have stayed anywhere to have seen him only for a minute. He had no need to be so ready to go away." And then she found herself burning all over, as it were, in her shame at discovering how bold her thoughts had been.

Perhaps this was the first time she really awoke to a full consciousness of where she had drifted. The current had carried her along so far, and she had not been to blame, because she had not comprehended her danger; but now it was different. She was awakening, but she was at the edge of the cataract, and its ominous sounds had alarmed her.

CHAPTER VI.

THEO GOES TO PARIS.

The letters that were faithfully written to Downport during the following month were the cause of no slight excitement in the house of David North, Esq. The children looked forward to the reception of them as an event worthy of being chronicled. Theo was an exact correspondent, and recorded her adventures and progress with as careful a precision as if it had been a matter of grave import whether she was in Boulogne or Bordeaux, or had stayed at one hotel or the other. It was not the pleasantest season of the year to travel, she wrote, but it was, of course, the gayest in the cities. Lady Throckmorton was very kind and very generous. She took her out a great deal, and spent a great deal of money in sight-seeing, which proved conclusively how kind she was, as her ladyship knew all the places worth looking at, as well as she knew Charing Cross or St. Paul's. And at the end of a month came a letter from Paris full of news and description.

> "We reached Paris three days ago," wrote Theo, "and are going to remain until Lady Throckmorton makes up her mind to go somewhere else, or to return to London. She has a great number of friends here, who have found us out already. She is very fond of Paris, and I think would rather stay here than anywhere else; so we may not come away until spring. We went to the opera last night, and saw Faust again. You remember my telling you about going to see Faust in London the first time I wore the rose-pink satin. I wore the same dress last night, and Lady Throckmorton lent me some of her diamonds, and made Splaighton puff my hair in a new way. Splaighton is my maid, and I don't know what to do with her sometimes, Pamela. You know I am used to waiting on myself, and she is so serious and dignified that I feel half ashamed to let her do things for me. Two or three gentlemen, who knew Lady Throckmorton, came into our box, and were introduced to me. One of them (I think Lady Throckmorton said he was an *attache*) called on us this

morning, and brought some lovely flowers. I must not forget to tell you about my beautiful morning robes. One of them is a white merino, trimmed with black velvet, and I am sure we should think it pretty enough for a party dress at home. I am glad you liked your little present, my darling Pam. Give my dearest love to Joanna and Elin, and tell them I am saving my pocket money to buy them some real Parisian dresses with. Love and kisses to mamma and the boys from

"Your THEO."

She did not know, this affectionate, handsome Theo, that when she wrote this innocent, schoolgirl letter, she might have made it a record of triumphs innumerable, though unconscious. She had never dreamed for a moment that it was the face at Lady Throckmorton's side that had caused such a sudden accession to the list of the faithful. But this was the case, nevertheless, and Lady Throckmorton was by no means unconscious of it. Of course, it was quite natural that people who had forgotten her in London should remember her in Paris; but it was even more natural that persons who did not care for her at all, should be filled with admiration for Theo in rose-colored satin. And so it was. Such a change came over the girl's life all at once, that, as it revealed itself to her, she was tempted to rub her bright eyes in her doubt as to the reality of it.

Two weeks after she reached Paris she awoke and found herself famous; she, Theodora North, to whom, as yet, Downport and shabbiness, and bread-and-butter cutting, were the only things that appeared real enough not to vanish at a touch. People of whom she had read six months ago, regarding their very existence as almost mythical, flattered, applauded, followed her. They talked of her, they praised her, they made high-flown speeches to her, at which she blushed, and glowed, and opened her lovely, half-uncomprehending eyes. She was glad they liked her, grateful for their attentions, half-confused under them; but it was some time before she understood the full meaning of their homage. In rose-colored satin and diamonds she dazzled them; but in simple white muslin, with a black-velvet ribbon about her perfect throat, and a great white rose in her dark hair, she was a glowing young goddess, of whom they raved extravagantly,

and who might have made herself a fashion, if she had been born a few years earlier, and been born in Paris.

Lady Throckmorton was actually proud of her, and committed extravagances she might have repented of, if the girl had not been so affectionately grateful and tractable. Then, as might be expected, there arose out of the train the indefatigable adorer, who is the fate of every pretty or popular girl. But in this case he was by no means unpleasant. He was famous, witty, and fortunate. He was no less a personage than the *attache*, of whom she had written to Pamela, and his name was Victor Maurien. He had been before all the rest, and so had gained some slight footing, which he was certainly not the man to relinquish. He had gained ground with Lady Throckmorton too, and in Denis Oglethorpe's absence, had begun almost to fill his place. He was graceful, faithful in her ladyship's service; he talked politics with her when she was gravely inclined, and told her the news when she was in a good humor; he was indefatigable and dignified at once, which is a rare combination; and he thought his efforts well rewarded by a seat at Theo's side in their box in the theatre, or by the privilege of handing her to her carriage, and gaining a few farewell words as he bade her good-night. He was not like the rest either. It was not entirely her beauty which had enchanted him, though, like all Frenchmen, he was a passionate worshipper of the beautiful. The sweet soul in her eyes had touched his heart. Her ignorance had done more to strengthen it than anything she could have done. There was not a spark of coquetry in her whole nature. She listened to his poetic speeches, wondering but believing—wondering how they could be true of her, yet trusting him and all the world too seriously to accuse him of anything but partiality.

To the last day of his life Victor Maurien will not forget one quiet evening, when he came to the hotel and found Theodora North by herself, in their private parlor, reading an English letter by the blaze of a candelabra. It had arrived that very day from Downport, and something in it had touched her, for when she rose to greet him, her gipsy eyes were mistily soft.

They began to draw near to each other that night. Half-unconsciously she drifted into confiding to him the yearnings toward the home whose shadows and sharpnesses absence had softened. It was singular how much

pleasanter everything seemed, now she looked back upon it in the past. Downport was not an unpleasant place after all. She could remember times when the sun shone upon the dingy little town and the wide-spread of beach, and made it almost pretty.

"I am afraid I did not love them all enough," she said. "Lady Throckmorton does not intend that I shall go there to remain again; but if I were to go, I feel as if I could help them more—Pamela, you know, and mamma. I want to send Joanna and Elin something, to show them that I don't forget them at all. I think I should like to send them some pretty dresses. Joanna is fair and she always wanted a pale-blue silk. Do you think a pale-blue silk would be very expensive, M. Maurien?"

She started, and colored a little the next moment, recognizing the oddity of her speech, and her little laugh was very sweet to hear.

"I forgot," she said. "How should you know, to be sure. Political men don't care about pale-blue silk, do they?" And she laughed again, such a fresh, enjoyable little laugh, that he was ready to fall down and worship her in his impulsive French fashion. Until Lady Throckmorton came, she amused him with talking of England and the English people, until the *naivete* of her manner had an indescribable fascination for him. He could have listened to her forever. She told him about Downport and its small lines, unconsciously showing him more of her past life than she fancied. Then, of course, she at last came to Broome street and Miss Elizabeth, and Miss Priscilla, and—Mr. Denis Oglethorpe.

"He is very talented, indeed," she said. "He has written, oh! a great deal. He once wrote a book of poems. I have the volume in one of my trunks."

He looked at her quietly but keenly when she said this, and he did not need more than a second glance to understand more than she understood herself. He read where Mr. Denis Oglethorpe stood, by the queer, sudden inner light in her eyes, and the unconscious fluctuation of rich color in her bright glowing face. He was struck with a secret pang in a second. There would be so frail a thread of hope for the man who was only second with a girl like this one.

"I know the gentleman you speak of," he said, aloud. "We all know him. He is a popular man. I saw him only a few weeks ago."

Her eyes flashed up to his—the whole of her face flashed with electric light.

"Did you?" she said. "Where was he? I didn't know—" and there she stopped.

"He was here," was the answer. "In Paris—in this very hotel, the day before you came here. He had overworked himself, I think. He was looking paler than usual, and somewhat worn-out. It was fatigue, I suppose."

Her eyes fell, and the light died away. She was thinking to herself that he might have waited twenty-four hours longer—only a day—such a short time. Just at that moment she felt passionately that she could not bear to let him go back to England and Priscilla Gower without a farewell word.

In all the whirl of excitement that filled her life, through all the days that were full of it, and the nights that were fairly dazzling to her unaccustomed eyes, she never forgot Denis Oglethorpe. She remembered him always in the midst of it all, and now her remembrance was of a different kind; there was more pain in it, more unrest, more longing and strength. She had ripened wonderfully since that last night in Broome street.

Among the circle of Lady Throckmorton's friends, and even beyond its pale, she was a goddess this winter. Her dark *viante* face, with its innocence and freshness of beauty, carried all before it, and this her first season was a continuation of girlish triumphs. The chief characteristic of her loveliness was that it inspired people with a sort of enthusiasm. When she entered a room a low murmur of pleasure followed her. There was not a man who had exchanged a word with her who would not have been ready to perform absurdities as well as impossibilities for her sweet young sake.

"How kind people are to me!" she would say to Lady Throckmorton. "I can hardly believe it, sometimes. Oh, how Joanna and Elin would like Paris!"

They had been two months in Paris, and in the meantime had heard nothing from Denis Oglethorpe. He had not written to Lady Throckmorton

since the letter dated from Vienna, so they supposed he had lost sight of them and thought writing useless. There were times when Theo tried to make up her mind that she had seen him for the last time before his marriage, but there were times again when, on going out, her last glance at her mirror had a thrill of expectation in it that was almost a pang.

She was sitting in their box in the theatre one night, half listening to Maurien, half to the singers, and wondering dreamily what was going on in Broome street at the moment, when she suddenly became conscious of a slight stir among the people in the seats on the other side of the house. She turned her face quickly, as if she had been magnetized. Making his way toward their box was a man whom at first she saw mistily, in a moment more quite clearly. Her heart began to beat faster than it had ever beaten in her young life, her hand closed upon her bouquet-holder with a nervous strength; she turned her face to the stage in the curious, excited, happy, and yet fearing tremor that took possession of her in a second. By some caprice or chance they had come to see Faust again, and the Marguerite who had been their attraction, was at this very moment standing upon the stage, repeating softly her simple, pathetic little love-spell,

"*Er lieber mich, er lieber mich nicht.*"

Theo found herself saying it after Marguerite to the beating of her heart. "*Er lieber mich, er lieber mich nicht. Er lieber mich,*—" and there she stopped, breathlessly, for the box door opened, and Denis Oglethorpe entered.

She had altered so much since they had last met that she scarcely dared to look at him, even after the confusion of greetings and formalities was over, and he had answered Lady Throckmorton's questions, and explained to her the cause of his protracted wandering—for, though she did not meet his eyes, she knew that he was altered, too. He looked worn and fatigued, she thought, and there was a new unrest in his expression.

It was fully a quarter of an hour before he left Lady Throckmorton and came to her side; but when he did so, something in his face or air, perhaps, made Victor Maurien give way to his greater need in an impulse of generosity.

There was a moment's silence between them after he sat down, during which, in her excited shyness, Theo only looked at Marguerite with a fluttering of rich, warm color on her cheeks. It was he who ended the pause himself.

"Are you glad to see me, Theodora?" he said, in a low, unsteady voice.

"Yes," she answered, tremulously. "I am glad."

"Thank you," he returned. "And yet it was chance that brought me here. I was not even sure you were in Paris until I saw you from the other side of the house a few moments ago. I wonder, my dear Theodora," slipping into the old careless, whimsical manner, "I wonder if I am doomed to be a rascal?"

It might be that her excitement made her nervous; at any rate there was a choking throb in her throat, as she answered him.

"If you please," she whispered, "don't."

His face softened, as if he was sorry for her girlish distress. He was struck with a fancy that if he were cruel enough to persist, he could make her cry. And then the relapse in the old manner, had only been a relapse after all, and had even puzzled himself a little. So he was quiet for a while.

"And so it is Faust again," he said, breaking the silence. "Do you remember what you said to me the first time you saw Faust, Theodora—the night the rose-colored satin came home? Do you remember telling me that you could die for love's sake? I wonder if you have changed your mind, among all the fine people you have seen, and all the fine speeches you have heard. I met one of Lady Throckmorton's acquaintances in Bordeaux, a few days ago, and he told me a wonderful story of a young lady who was then turning the wise heads of half the political Parisians—a sort of enchanted princess, with a train of adorers ready to kiss the hem of her garment."

He was endeavoring to be natural, and was failing wretchedly. His voice was actually sad, and she had never heard it sad in all their intercourse before. She had never thought it could be sad, and the sound was something like a revelation of the man. It made her afraid of herself—

afraid for herself. And yet above all this arose a thrill of happiness which was almost wild. He was near her again! he had not gone away, he would not go away yet. Yet! there was a girl's foolish, loving comfort in the word! It seemed so impossible that she could lose him forever, that for the brief moment she forgot Priscilla Gower and justice altogether. In three months the whole world had altered its face to her vision. She had altered herself; her life had altered she knew, but she did not know that she had been happier in her ignorance of her own heart than she could be now in her knowledge of it.

Her little court were not very successful to-night. Denis Oglethorpe kept his place at her side with a persistence which baffled the boldest of her admirers, and she was too happy to remember the rest of the world. It was not very polite, perhaps, and certainly it was not very wise to forget everything but that she herself was not forgotten; but she forgot everything else—this pretty Theo, this handsome and impolitic Theo. She did not care for her court, though she was sweet-temperedly grateful to her courtiers for their homage. She did care for Denis Oglethorpe. Ah, poor Priscilla! He went home with them to their hotel. He stayed, too, to eat of the *petite souper* Lady Throckmorton had ordered. Her ladyship had a great deal to say to him, and a great number of questions to ask, so he sat with them for an hour or so accounting for himself and replying to numberless queries, all the time very conscious of Theo, who sat by the fire in a mist of white drapery and soft, thick, white wraps, the light from the wax tapers flickering in Pamela's twinkling sapphires, and burning in the great crimson-hearted rose fastened in the puffs of her hair.

But Lady Throckmorton remembered at last that she had to give some orders to her maid, and so for a moment they were left together.

Then he went to the white figure at the fire and stood before it, losing something of both color and calmness. He was going to be guilty of a weakness, and knowing it, could not control himself. He was not so great a hero as she had fancied him, after all. But it would have been very heroic to have withstood a temptation so strong and so near.

"Theo," he said. "The man who ran away from the danger he dared not face is a greater coward than he fancied. The chances have been against him,

too. I suppose to-night he must turn his back to it again, but—"

She stopped him all at once with a little cry. She had been so happy an hour ago, that she could not fail to be weak now. Her face dropped upon the hands on her lap, and were hidden there. The crimson-hearted rose slipped from her hair and fell to her feet.

"No, no!" she cried. "Don't go. It is only for a little while; don't go yet!"

CHAPTER VII.

"PARTING IS SWEET SORROW."

He did not go away. He could not yet. He stayed in Paris, day after day, even week after week, lingering through a man's very human weakness. He could no longer resist the knowledge of the fact that he had lost the best part of the battle; he had lost it in being compelled to acknowledge the presence of danger by flight; he had lost it completely after this by being forced to admit to himself that there was not much more to lose, that in spite of his determination, Theodora North had filled his whole life and nature as Priscilla Gower had never filled it, and could never fill it, were she his wife for a thousand years. He had made a mistake, and discovered having made it too late—that was all; but he blamed himself for having made it; blamed himself for being blind; blamed himself more than all for having discovered his blindness and his blunder. Thinking thus, he resolved to go away. Yes, he would go away! He would marry Priscilla at once, and have it over. He would put an impassable barrier between himself and Theo.

But, though he reproached himself, and anathematized himself, and resolved to go away, he did not leave Paris. He stayed in the face of his remorseful wretchedness. It was a terrible moral condition to be in, but he absolutely gave up, for the time, to the force of circumstances, and floated recklessly with the current.

If he had loved Theodora North when he left her for Priscilla's sake, he loved her ten thousand fold, when he forbore to leave her for her own. He loved her passionately, blindly, jealously. He envied every man who won a smile from her, even while his weakness angered him. She had changed greatly during their brief separation, but the change grew deeper after they had once again encountered each other. She was more conscious of herself, more fearful, less innocently frank. She did not reveal herself to him as she had once done. There is a stage of love in which frankness is at once

unnatural and impossible, and she had reached this stage. Even her letters to Priscilla were not frank after his reappearance.

Since the night of their interview after their return from the theatre, he had not referred openly to his reasons for remaining. He had held himself to the letter of his bond so far, at least, though he was often sorely tempted. He visited Lady Throckmorton and Theo as he had visited them in London, and was their attendant cavalier upon most occasions, but beyond that he rarely transgressed. It was by no means a pleasant position for a man in love to occupy. The whole world was between him and his love, it seemed. The most infatuated of Theodora North's adorers did not fear him, handsome and popular as he was, dangerous rival as he might have appeared. Lady Throckmorton's world knew the history of their favorite, having learned it as society invariably learns such things. Most of them knew that his fate had been decided for years; all of them knew that his stay in Paris could not be a long one. A man whose marriage is to be celebrated in June has not many months to lose between February and May.

But this did not add to the comfort of Denis Oglethorpe. The rest of Theo's admirers had a right to speak—he must be silent. The shallowest of them might ask a hearing—he dared not for his dishonored honor's sake. So even while nearest to her he stood afar off, as it were a witness to the innocent triumph of a girlish popularity that galled him intolerably. He puzzled her often in these days, and out of her bewilderment grew a vague unhappiness.

And yet, in spite of this, her life grew perilously sweet at times. Only a few months ago she had dreamed of such bliss as Jane Eyre's and Zulick's, wonderingly; but there were brief moments now and then when she believed in it faithfully. She was very unselfish in her girlish passion. She thought of nothing but the wondrous happiness love could bring to her. She would have given up all her new luxuries and triumphs for Denis Oglethorpe's sake. She would have gone back to Downport with him, to the old life; to the mending, and bread-and-butter cutting, and shabby dresses; she would have taken it all up again cheerfully, without thinking for one moment that she had made a sacrifice. Downport would have been a paradise with him. She was wonderfully devoid of calculation or worldly

wisdom, if she had only been conscious of it. An absurdly loving, simple, impolitic young person was this Theodora of ours; but I, for one, must confess to feeling some weak sympathy for her very ignorance.

Among the many of the girl's admirers whom Denis Oglethorpe envied jealously, perhaps the one most jealously envied, was Victor Maurien. A jealous man might have feared him with reason under any circumstances, and Denis chafed at his good-fortune miserably. The man who had the honorable right to success could not fail to torture him.

"It would be an excellent match for Theo," was Lady Throckmorton's complacent comment on the subject of the *attache's* visit, and the comment was made to Denis himself. "M. Maurien is the very man to take good care of her; and besides that, he is, of course, desirable. Girls like Theo ought to marry young. Marriage is their *forte*; they are too dependent to be left to themselves. Theo is not like Pamela or your Priscilla Gower, for instance; queenly as Theo looks, she is the veriest strengthless baby on earth. It is a source of wonder to me where she got the regal air."

But, perhaps, Lady Throckmorton did not understand her lovely young relative fully. She did not take into consideration a certain mental ripening process which had gone on slowly but surely during the last few months. The time came when Theodora North began to comprehend her powers, and feel the change in herself sadly. Then it was that she ceased to be frank with Denis Oglethorpe, and began to feel a not fully-defined humiliation and remorse.

Coming in unexpectedly once, Denis found her sitting all alone, with open book in her lap, and eyes brooding over the fire. He knew the volume well enough at sight; it was the half-forgotten, long-condemned collection of his youthful poems; and when she saw him, she shut it up, and laid her folded hands upon it, as if she did not wish him to recognize it.

He was in one of his most unhappy moods, for some reason or other, and so unreasonable was his frame of mind, that the movement, simple as it was, galled him bitterly.

"Will you tell me why you did that?" he asked, abruptly.

Her eyes fell upon the carpet at her feet, but she sat with her hands still clasped upon the half-concealed book, without answering him.

"You would not have done it three months ago," he said, almost wrathfully, "and the thing is not more worthless now than it was then, though it was worthless enough. Give it to me, and let me fling it into the fire."

She looked up at him all at once, and her eyes were full to the brim. Lady Throckmorton was right in one respect. She was strengthless enough sometimes. She was worse than strengthless against Denis Oglethorpe.

"Don't be angry with me," she said, almost humbly. "I don't think you could be angry with me if you knew how unhappy I am to-day." And the tears that had brimmed upward fell upon the folded hands themselves.

"Why to-day?" he asked, softening with far more reason than he had been galled. "What has to-day brought, Theodora?"

She answered him with a soft little gasp, of a remorseful sob. "It has brought M. Maurien," she confessed.

"And sent him away again?" he added, in a low, unsteady voice.

She nodded; her simple, pathetic sorrowfulness showing itself even in the poor little gesture.

"He has been very fond of me for a long time," she said, tremulously. "He says that he loves me. He came to ask me to be his wife. I am very sorry for him."

"Why?" he asked again, unsteadily.

"I was obliged to make him unhappy," she answered. "I do not love him."

"Why?" he repeated yet again; but his voice had sunk into a whisper.

"Because," she said, trembling all over now—"because I cannot."

He could not utter another word. There was such danger for him, and his perilled honor, in her simple tremor and sadness, that he was forced to be silent.

It was not safe to follow M. Maurien at least. But, as might be anticipated, their conversation flagged in no slight degree. The hearts of both were so full of one subject that it would have been hard to force them to another. Theo, upon her low *sultane,* sat mute with drooped eyes, becoming more silent every moment. Oglethorpe, in regarding her beautiful downcast face, forgot himself also. It was almost half an hour before he remembered he had not made the visit without an object. He had something to say to her—something he had once said to her before. He was going away again, and had come to tell her so. But he recollected himself at last.

"I must not forget that I had a purpose in coming here to-night," he said.

"A purpose?" she repeated, after him.

"Yes," he answered. "I found last night, on returning to my hotel, that there was a letter awaiting me from London—from my employers, in fact. I must leave Paris to-morrow morning."

"And will you not come back again?" she added, breathlessly almost. The news was so sudden that it made her breathless. This was the last time—the very last!

They might never see each other again in this world, and if they did ever chance to meet, Priscilla Gower would be his wife. And yet he was standing there now, only a few feet from her, so near that her outstretched hand would touch him. The full depth of misery in the thought flashed upon her all at once, and drove the blood back to her heart.

"Why?" she gasped out unconsciously, through the very strength of her pangs. "You are going away forever."

She scarcely knew that she had uttered the words until she saw how deathly pale he grew. The beads of moisture started out upon his forehead, and his nervous hand went up to brush them away.

"Not forever, I trust," he said, huskily. "Only until—until—"

"Until July," she ended for him; "until you are married to Miss Priscilla Gower."

She held up one little, trembling, dusky hand, and actually began to tell the intervening months off her fingers. She was trying so hard to calm herself that she did not think what she was doing. She only knew she must do or say something.

"How many months will it be?" she said. "It is February now; March, April, May, June, July. Five months—not quite five, perhaps. We may not be here then. Lady Throckmorton intends to visit the Spas during the summer."

From the depths of her heart she was praying that some chance might take them away from Paris before he returned. It would be his bridal tour—Priscilla's bridal tour. Ah, if some wildly happy dream had only chanced to make it her bridal tour, and she could have gone with him as Priscilla would, from place to place; near him all the time, loving and trusting him always, depending on him, obedient to his lightest wishes. Miss Priscilla was far too self-restrained to ever be as foolishly, thrillingly tender and fond, and happy as she, Theodora North, would have been. She could have given a little sob of despair and pain as she thought of it.

As it was, the hopeless, foolish tears rose up to her large eyes, and made them liquid and soft; and when they rose, Denis Oglethorpe saw them. Such beautiful eyes as they were; such ignorant, believing, fawn-like eyes. The eyes alone would have unmanned him—under the tears he broke down utterly, and so was left without a shadow of control.

He crossed the hearth with a stride and stood close to her, his whole face ablaze with the fierceness of his remorseful self-reproach and the power of his love.

"Listen to me, Theo," he said. "Let me confess to you; let me tell you the truth for once. I am a coward and a villain. I was a villain to ask a woman I did not truly love to be my wife. I am a coward to shrink from the result of my vanity and madness. She is better than I am—this woman who has promised herself to me; she is stronger, truer, purer; she has loved me, she has been faithful to me; and God knows I honor and revere her. I am not worthy to kiss the ground her feet have trodden upon. I was vain fool enough to think I could make her happy by giving to her all she did not ask for—my life, my work, my strength—not remembering that Heaven had

given her the sacred right to more. She has held to our bond for years, and now see how it has ended! I stand here before you to-night, loving you, adoring you, worshipping you, and knowing myself a dishonored man, a weak, proved coward, whose truth is lost forever.

"I do not ask you for a word. I do not say a word further. I will not perjure myself more deeply. I only say this as a farewell confession. It will be farewell; we shall never see each other again on earth perhaps; and if we do, an impassable gulf will lie between us. I shall go back to England and hasten the marriage if I can; and then, if a whole life's strenuous exertions and constant care and tenderness will wipe out the dishonor my weakness has betrayed me into, it shall be wiped out. I do not say one word of love to you, because I dare not. I only say, forgive me, forget me, and good-by."

She had listened to him with a terrified light growing in her eyes; but when he finished she got up from her seat, shivering from head to foot.

"Good-by," she said, and let him take her cold, lithe, trembling hands. But the moment he touched them, his suppressed excitement and her own half-comprehended pain seemed to frighten her, and she began to try to draw them from his grasp.

"Go away, please," she said, with a wild little sob. "I can't bear it. I don't want to be wicked, and perhaps I have been wicked, too. Miss Gower is better than I am—more worth loving. Oh, try to love her, and—and—only go away now, and let me be alone."

She ended in an actual little moan. She was shivering and sobbing, hard as she tried to govern herself. And yet, though this man loved her, and would have given half his life to snatch her to his arms and rain kisses of comfort upon her, he let the cold little hand drop, and in a moment more had left her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THEO'S FIRST TROUBLE.

He had been gone three days, and, in their lapse, Theo felt as if three lustrums had passed. Their parting had been so unexpected a one, that she could not get used to it, or believe it was anything else but a painful dream. After all, it seemed that Fortune was crueller than she had imagined possible. He was gone, and to Priscilla Gower; and she had never been able to believe that some alteration, of which she had no very definite conception, would occur, and end her innocent little ghost of a love-story, as all love-stories should be ended. It had never been more than the ghost of a story. Until that last night he had never uttered a word of love to her; he had never even made the fine speeches to her which she might have expected, and, doubtless, would have expected, if she had been anybody else but Theodora North. She had not expected them, though, and, consequently, was not disappointed when she did not receive them. But she found herself feeling terribly lonely after Denis Oglethorpe left Paris. The first day she felt more stunned than anything else. The second her sensibilities began to revive keenly, and she was full of sad, desperate wonder concerning him—concerning how he would feel when he stood face to face with Priscilla Gower; how he would look, what he would say to her. The third day was only the second intensified, and filled with a something that was almost like a terror now and then.

It was upon this third day that Lady Throckmorton was unexpectedly called away. A long-lost friend of her young days had suddenly made her appearance at Rouen, and having, by chance, heard of her ladyship's presence in Paris, had written to her a letter of invitation, which the ties of their girlhood rendered almost a command. So to Rouen her ladyship went, for once leaving Theo behind. Madam St. Etunne was an invalid, and the visit could not be a very interesting one to a young girl. This was one reason why she was left—the other was the more important one, that she did not wish to go, and made her wishes known. She was not sorry for the

chance of being left to herself for a few days—it would be only a few days at most.

"Besides," said Lady Throckmorton, looking at her a trifle curiously, "you do not look well yourself. Theo, you look feverish, or nervous, or something of the kind. How was it I did not notice it before? You must have caught cold. Yes, I believe I must leave you here."

Consequently, Theo was left. She was quiet enough, too, when her ladyship had taken her departure. It was generally supposed that Miss North had accompanied her chaperon, and so she had very few callers. She spent the greater part of her time in the apartment in which Denis Oglethorpe had bidden her farewell, and, as may be easily imagined, it did not add to her lightness of spirit to sit in her old seat and ponder over the past in the silence of the deserted room. She arose from her ottoman one night, and walked to one of the great mirrors that extended from floor to ceiling. She saw herself in it as she advanced—a regal-like young figure, with a head set like a queen's, speechful dark eyes, and glowing lips; a face that was half child's, half woman's, and yet wholly perfect in its fresh young life and beauty. Seeing this reflection, she stopped and looked at it, in a swift recognition of a new thought.

"Oh, Pam!" she cried out, piteously. "Oh, my poor, darling, faded Pam. You were pretty once, too, very dear, pretty and young. And you were happier than I can be, for Arthur only died. Nobody came between your love and you—nobody ever could. He died, but he was yours, Pam, and you were his."

She cried piteously and passionately when she went back to her seat, rested her arm upon a lounging-chair near her, and hid her face upon it, crying as only a girl can, with an innocent grief that had a pathos of its own. She was so lovely and remorseful. It seemed to her that some fault must have been hers, and she blamed herself that even now she could not wish that she had never met the man whose love for her was a dishonor to himself. Where was he now? He had told Lady Throckmorton that business would call him to several smaller towns on his way, so he might not be very far from Paris yet. She was thinking of this when at last she fell asleep, sitting by the fire, still resting her hand upon the chair by her

side. It was by no means unnatural, though by no means poetic, that her girl's pain should end so.

But when the time-piece on the mantle chimed twelve with its silver tongue, she found herself suddenly and unaccountably wide awake. She sat up and looked about her. It was not the clock's chime that had awakened her she thought. It must have been, something more, she was so very wide awake indeed, and her senses were so clear. One minute later she found out what it was. There was some slight confusion down-stairs; a door was opened and closed, and she heard the sound of voices in the entrance-hall. She turned her head, and listening attentively, discovered that some one was coming up to the room in which she sat. The door opened, and upon the threshold stood a servant bearing in his hand a salver, and upon the salver a queer, official-looking document, such as she did not remember ever having seen before.

"A telegram," he said, rapidly in French, "for milady. They had thought it better to acquaint Mad'moiselle."

She took it from him, and opened it slowly and mechanically. She read it mechanically also—read it twice before she comprehended its full meaning, so great was the shock it gave her. Then she started from her seat with a cry that made the servant start also.

"Send Splaighton to me," she said, "this minute, without a moment's delay."

For the telegram she had just read told her that in a wayside inn, at St. Quentin, Denis Oglethorpe lay dying, or so near it that the medical man had thought it his duty to send for the only friend who was on the right side of Calais, and that friend, whose name he had discovered by chance, was Lady Throckmorton.

It was, of course, a terribly unwise thing that Theodora North decided upon doing an hour later. Only such a girl as she was, or as her life had necessarily made her, would have hit upon a plan so loving, so wild and indiscreet. But it did not occur to her, even for a second, that there was any other thing to do. She must go to him herself in Lady Throckmorton's stead; she must take Splaighton with her, and go try to take care of him

until Lady Throckmorton came, or could send for Priscilla Gower and Miss Elizabeth.

"Ma'mselle," began the stricken Splaighton, when, as she stood before the erect young figure and desperate young face, this desperate plan was hurriedly revealed to her. "Ma'mselle, you forget the imprudence—"

But Theo stopped her, quite ignorant of the fact, that by doing so, she forfeited her reputation in Splaighton's eyes forever.

"He is going to die!" she said, with a wild little sob in her voice. "And he is all alone-and—and he was to have been married, Splaighton, in July—only a few months from now. Oh, poor Priscilla Gower! Oh, poor girl! We must save him. I must go now and try to save him for her. Oh, if I could just have Pamela with me."

The woman saw at once that remonstrance would be worse than useless. Theo was slowly revealing to her that this despairing, terrified young creature would not understand her resistance in the slightest degree. She would not comprehend what it meant; so, while Splaighton packed up a few necessary articles, Theo superintended her, following her from place to place, with a longing impatience that showed itself in every word and gesture. She did not dare to do more, poor child. She had never overcome her secret awe of her waiting-woman. In her inexperienced respect for her, she even apologized pathetically and appealingly for the liberty she was taking in calling upon her.

"I am sorry to trouble you," she said, humbly, and feeling terribly homesick as she said it; "but I could not go alone, you know—and I must go. There is a lace collar in that little box that you may have, Splaighton. It is a pretty collar, and I will give you the satin bow that is fastened to it."

Scarcely two hours later they were on their way to St. Quentin. It never occurred to Theo, in the midst of her fright and unhappiness, that she was now doing a very unwise and dangerous thing. She only thought of one thing, that Denis was going to die. She loved him too much to think of herself at all, and, besides, she did not, poor innocent, know anything about such things.

It was a wonderful trial of the little old French doctor's calmness of mind, when, on his next visit to his patient, he found himself confronted by a tall, young creature, with a pale, desperate face, and lovely tear-fraught eyes, instead of by the majestic, elderly person, the perusal of Lady Throckmorton's last letter to Denis had led him to expect. It was in the little inn parlor that he first encountered Theodora North, when she arrived, and on seeing her he gazed over his spectacles, first at herself, and then at the respectable Splaighton, in a maze of bewilderment, at seemingly having made so strange a blunder.

"Lady Throckmorton?" he said, at last, in English, or in a broken attempt at it. "Oh! *Oui*—I understand. The sister of monsieur? Ah, milady?"

Theo broke in upon him in a passionate impulse of fear and grief.

"No," she said. "I am not Lady Throckmorton. I am only her niece, Theodora North. My aunt was away when your telegram arrived, and—and I knew some one must come—so I came myself. Splaighton and I can take care of Mr. Oglethorpe. Oh, monsieur, is it true that he is dying?—will he never get well? How could it happen? He was so strong only a few days since. He must not die. It cannot be true that he will die—he has so many friends who love him."

Monsieur, the doctor, softened perceptibly under this; she was so young and innocent-looking, this girlish little English mademoiselle. Monsieur up-stairs must be a lucky man to have won her tender young heart so utterly. Strange and equivocal a thing as the pretty child (she seemed a child to him) was doing, he never for an instant doubted the ignorant faith and love that shone in the depths of her beautiful agonized eyes. He bowed to her as deferentially as to a sultana, when he made his answer.

"It had been an accident," he commenced. "The stage had overturned on its way, and monsieur being in it, had been thrown out by its falling into a gully. His collar-bone had been broken, and several of his ribs fractured; but the worst of his injuries had been a gash on his head—a sharp stone had done it. Mademoiselle would understand wherein the danger lay. He was unconscious at present."

This he told her on their way to the chamber up-stairs; but even the gravity of his manner did not prepare her for the sight the opening of the door revealed to her. Handsome Denis Oglethorpe lay upon the narrow little bed with the face of a dying man, which is far worse than that of a dead man. There were spots of blood on his pillow and upon his garments; he was bandaged from head to foot, it seemed, with ghastly red, wet bandages; his eyes were glazed, and his jaw half dropped.

A low, wild cry broke from the pale lips of the figure in the door-way, and the next instant Theodora North had flown to the bedside and dropped upon her knees by it, hiding her deathly-stricken young face upon her lover's lifeless hand, forgetting Splaighton, forgetting the doctor, forgetting even Priscilla Gower, forgetting all but that she, in this moment, knew that she could not give him up, even to the undivided quiet of death.

"He will die! He will die!" she cried out. "And I never told him. Oh, my love! love! Oh, my dearest, dear!"

The little, old doctor drew back, half way, through a suddenly stranger impulse of sympathy. He was uneasily conscious of the fact, that the staid, elderly person at his side was startled and outraged simultaneously by this passionate burst of grief on the part of her young mistress. He had seen so many of these unprepossessing English waiting-women that he understood the state of her feelings as by instinct. He turned to her with all the blandness possible under the circumstances, and gave her an order which would call for her presence down-stairs.

When she departed, as she did in a state bordering on petrification, he came forward to the bedside. He did not speak, however; merely looking down at his patient in a silence whose delicacy was worthy of honor, even in a shrivelled little snuff-taking, French, village doctor. The pretty young mademoiselle would be calmer before many minutes had elapsed—his experience had taught him. And so she was. At least, her first shock of terror wore away, and she was calm enough to speak to him. She lifted her face from the motionless hand, and looked up at him in a wild appeal for help, that was more than touching.

"Don't say he will die!" she prayed. "Oh, monsieur, only save him, and he will bless you forever. I will nurse him so well. Only give me something to

do, and see how faithful I shall prove. I shall never forget anything, and I shall never be tired—if—if he can only live, monsieur," the terrified catching of her breath making every little pause almost a sob.

"My child," he answered her, with a grave touch of something quite like affection in his air. "My child, I shall save him, if he is to be saved, and you shall help me."

How faithfully she held to the very letter of her promises, only this little, shrivelled village doctor could say. How tender, and watchful, and loving she was, in her care of her charge, only he could bear witness. She was never tired—never forgetful. She held to her place in the poor little bedroom, day and night, with an intensity of zeal that was actually astonishing. Priscilla Gower and Pamela North might have been more calm—certainly would have been more self-possessed, but they could not have been more faithful. She obeyed every order given to her like a child. She sat by the bedside, hour after hour, day and night, watching every change of symptom, noting every slight alteration of color, or pulse.

The friendship between herself and monsieur, the doctor, so strengthened that the confidence between them was unlimited. She was only disobedient in one thing. She would not leave her place either for food or rest. She ate her poor little dinners near her patient, and, if the truth had been known, scarcely slept at all for the first two or three days.

"I could not sleep, you know," she said to the doctor, her great pathetic eyes filling with tears. "Please let me stay until Lady Throckmorton comes, at least."

So she stayed, and watched, and waited, quite alone, for nearly a week. But it seemed a much longer time to her. The poor, handsome face changed so often in even those few days, and her passions of despair and hope were so often changed with it. She never thought of Priscilla Gower. Her love and fear were too strong to allow of her giving a thought to anything on earth but Denis Oglethorpe. Perhaps her only consolation had something of guilt in it; but it was so poor and desperate a comfort, this wretched one of hearing him speak to and of her in his fever and delirium.

"My poor, handsome Theo," he would say. "Why, my beauty, there are tears in your eyes. What a scoundrel I am, if I have brought them there. What! the rose-colored satin again, my darling! Don't wear the rose-colored satin, Theo. It hurts my eyes. For God's sake, Priscilla, forgive me!"

And yet, even while they added to her terror, these poor ravings were some vague comfort, since they told her that he loved her. More than once her friend the doctor entered the room, and found her kneeling by the bedside, holding the unresponsive hand, with a white face and wide, tearless eyes; and seeing her thus, he read clearly that his pretty, inexperienced *protege* had more at stake than he had even at first fancied.

It was about six days after Theodora North had arrived at St. Quentin, when, sitting at her post one morning, she heard the lumbering stage stop before the inn door. She rose and went to the window, half mechanically, half anxiously. She had been expecting Lady Throckmorton, for so long a time, that it seemed almost impossible that it could be she. But strangers had evidently alighted. There was a bustle of servants below, and one of them was carrying a leathern trunk into the house immediately under her window. It was a leathern trunk, rather shabby than otherwise, and on its side was an old label, which, being turned toward her, she could read plainly. She read it, and gave a faint start. It bore, in dingy black letters, the word "Downport."

She had hardly time to turn round, before there was a summons at the door, and without waiting to be answered, Splaighton entered, looking at once decorous and injured.

"There are two ladies in the parlor, mademoiselle," she said (she always called Theo mademoiselle in these days), "two English ladies, who did not give their names. They asked for Miss North."

Theo looked at the woman, and turned pale. She did not know how or why her mother and Pamela should come down to this place, but she felt sure it was they who were awaiting her; and for the first time since she had received the telegram, a shock of something like misgiving rushed upon her. Suppose, after all, she had not done right. Suppose she had done wrong, and they had heard of it, and came to reproach her, or worse still

(poor child, it seemed worse still to her), to take her away—to make her leave her love to strangers. She began to tremble, and as she went out of the room, she looked back on the face upon the pillow, with a despairing fear that the look might be her last.

She hardly knew how she got down the narrow stair-case. She only knew that she went slowly, in a curious sort of hysterical excitement.

Then she was standing upon the mat at the parlor-door; then she had opened the door itself, and stood upon the threshold, looking in upon two figures just revealed to her in the shadow. One figure—yes, it was Pamela's; the other not her mother's. No, the figure of Priscilla Gower.

"Pamela!" she cried out. "Oh, Pam, don't blame me!"

She never knew how the sight of her standing before them, like a poor little ghost, with her white, appealing eyes, touched one of these two women to the heart.

There was something pathetic in her very figure—something indescribably so in her half-humble, half-fearing voice.

Pamela rose up from the horse-hair sofa, and went to her.

Each of the three faces was pale enough; but Pamela had the trouble of these two, as well as her own anxiousness in her eyes.

"Theo," she said to her, "what have you done? Don't you understand what a mad act you have been guilty of?"

But her voice was not as sharp as usual, and it even softened before she finished speaking. She made Theo sit down, and gave her a glass of water to steady her nervousness. She could not be angry even at such indiscretion as this—in the face of the tremulous hands and pleading eyes.

"Where was Lady Throckmorton?" she said. "What was she doing, to let you come alone?"

"She was away," put in Theo, faintly. "And the telegram said he was dying, Pam, and—I didn't come alone quite. I brought Splaighton with me."

"You had no right to come at all," said Pam, trying to speak with asperity, and failing miserably. "Mr. Oglethorpe is nothing to you. They should have sent for Miss Gower at once."

But the fact was the little doctor had searched in vain for the exact address of the lady whose letters he found in his patient's portmanteau, when examining his papers to find some clue to the whereabouts of his friends, and it was by the merest chance that he had discovered it in the end from Theo's own lips, and so had secretly written to Broome street, in his great respect and admiration for this pretty young nurse, who was at once so youthful and indescribably innocent. In her trouble and anxious excitement, Theo had not once thought of doing so herself, until during the last two days, and now there was no necessity for the action.

"And Mr. Oglethorpe," interposed Miss Gower.

"He is up-stairs," Theo answered. "The doctor thinks that perhaps he may be saved by careful nursing. I did what I could," and she stopped with a curious click in her throat.

The simple sight of Priscilla Gower, with her calm, handsome face, and calm, handsome presence, set her so far away from him and she had seemed so near to him during the few last days—she felt so poor and weak through the contrast. And Pamela was right. She was nothing to him—he was nothing to her. This was his wife who had come to him now, and she—what was she?

She led them up-stairs to the sick-room, silently, and there left them. It had actually never occurred to her to ask herself how it was that the two were together. She was thinking only about Denis. She went to her own little bedroom at the top of the house—such a poor, little bare place as it was, as poor and bare as only a bedroom in a miserable little French road-side inn can be—only the low, white bed in it, a chair or two, and a barren toilet-table standing near the deep window. This deep, square window was the only part of the room holding any attraction for Theo. From it she could look out along the road, where the lumbering stages made their daily appearance, and could see miles of fields behind the hedges, and watch the peasant women in their wooden sabots journeying on to the market towns. She flung herself down on the bare floor, in the recess formed by the

window, and folded her arms upon its broad ledge. She looked out for a minute at the road, and the fields, and the hedges, and then gave vent to a single, sudden desperate sob. Nobody knew her pain—nobody would ever know it. Perhaps everything would end, and pass, and die away forever, and it would be her own pain to the end of her life. Even Denis himself would not know it. He had never asked her to tell him that she loved him, and if he died, he would die without having heard a word of love from her lips. What would they do with her now—Priscilla and Pamela? Make her go back to Paris, and leave him to them; and if he got well they might never meet again, and, perhaps, he would never learn who had watched by his bedside, when no one else on earth was near to try to save him.

She dropped her face upon her folded arms, sobbing in a great, uncontrollable burst of rebellion against her fate.

"No one cares for us, my darling, my angel, my love!" she cried. "They would take me from you, if they could; but they shall not, my own. If it was wrong, how can I help it? And, oh! what does it matter, if all the world should be lost to me, if only you could be left? If I could only see your dear face once every day, and hear your voice, even if it was ever so far away, and you were not speaking to me at all."

She was so wearied with her watching and excitement, that her grief wore itself away into silence and exhausted quiet. She did not raise her head, but let it rest upon her arms as she knelt, and before many minutes had passed, her eyes closed with utter weariness.

She awoke with a start, half an hour later. Some one was standing near her. It had been twilight when she fell asleep, and now the room was so gray, that she could barely distinguish who it was. A soft, thick shawl had been dropped over her, evidently by the person in question. When Theo's eyes became accustomed to the shadows, she recognized the erect, slender figure and handsome head. It was Priscilla Gower, and Priscilla Gower was leaning against the window, and looking down at her fixedly.

"You were cold when I found you," were her first words, "and so I threw my shawl around you. You ought not to have gone to sleep there."

"I fell asleep before I knew that I was tired," said Theo. "Thank you, Miss Gower."

There was a pause of a moment, before she summoned courage to speak again.

"I have not had time yet," she hesitated, at last, "to ask you how Miss Elizabeth is. I hope she is well?"

"I am sorry to say she is not," Priscilla replied. "If she had been well, she would have accompanied me here. She has been very weak of late. It was on that account that I applied to your sister when the doctor's letter told me I was needed."

"I have been expecting Lady Throckmorton for so long, that I am afraid something has gone wrong," said Theo.

To this remark, Priscilla made no reply. She was never prone to be communicative regarding Lady Throckmorton. But she had come here to say something to Theodora North, and at last she said it.

"You have been here—how long?" she asked, suddenly.

"Nearly a week," said Theo.

"Is Mr. Oglethorpe better, or worse, than when you saw him first?"

"I do not know exactly," answered the low, humble voice. "Sometimes better—though I do not think he is ever much worse."

Another pause, and then:

"You were very brave to come so far alone."

The beautiful, dark, inconsistently, un-English face was uplifted all at once, but the next moment it dropped with a sob of actual anguish.

"Oh, Miss Gower!" the girl cried. "Don't blame me; please don't blame me. There was no one else, and the telegram said he was dying."

"Hush," said Priscilla Gower, with an inexplicable softness in her tone. "I don't blame you; I should have done the same thing in your place."

"But you—" began Theo, faintly.

Priscilla stopped her before she had time to finish her sentence; stopped her with a cold, clear, steady voice.

"No," she said. "You are making a mistake."

What this brief speech meant, she did not explain; but she evidently had understood what Theodora was going to say, and had not wished to hear it.

But brief speech as it was, its brevity held a swift pang of new fear for Theo. She could not quite comprehend its exact meaning, but it struck a fresh dread to her heart. Could it be that she knew the truth, and was going to punish him? Could she be cruel enough to think of reproaching him at such an hour as this, when he lay at death's door? Some frantic idea of falling at her stern feet and pleading for him rushed into her mind. But the next moment, glancing up at the erect, motionless figure, she became dimly conscious of something that quieted her, she scarcely knew how.

The dim room was so quiet, too; there was so deep a stillness upon the whole place, it seemed that she gained a touch of courage for the instant. Priscilla was not looking at her now; her statuesque face was turned toward the wide expanse of landscape, fast dying out, as it were, in the twilight grayness. Theo's eyes rested on her for a few minutes in a remorseful pity for, and a mute yearning toward this woman whom she had so bitterly, yet so unconsciously wronged. She would not wrong her more deeply still; the wrong should end just as she had thought it had ended, when Denis dropped her hand and left her standing alone before the fire that last night in Paris. This resolve rose up in her mind with a power so overwhelming, that it carried before it all the past of rebellion, and pain, and love. She would go away before he knew that she had been with him at all. She would herself be the means of bringing to pass the end she had only so short a time ago rebelled against so passionately. He should think it was his promised wife who had been with him from the first. She would make Priscilla promise that it should be so. Having resolved this, her new courage—courage, though it was so full of desperate, heart-sick pain, helped her to ask a question bearing upon her thoughts. She touched the motionless figure with her hand.

"Did Pamela come here to bring me away?" she asked.

Priscilla Gower turned, half starting, as though from a reverie.

"What did you say?" she said.

"Did Pamela come to take me away from here?" Theo repeated.

"No," she said. "Do not be afraid of that."

Theo looked out of the window, straight over her folded arms. The answer had not been given unkindly, but she could not look at Priscilla Gower, in saying what she had to say.

"I am not afraid," she said. "I think it would be best; I must go back to Paris or to—to Downport, before Mr. Oglethorpe knows I have been here at all. You can take care of him now—and there is no need that he should know I ever came to St. Quentin. I dare say I was very unwise in coming as I did; but, I am afraid I would do the same thing again under the same circumstances. If you will be so kind as to let him think that—that it was you who came——"

Priscilla Gower interrupted her here, in the same manner, and with the same words, as she had interrupted her before.

"Hush!" she said. "You are making a mistake, again——"

She did not finish what she was saying. A hurried footstep upon the stairs stopped her; and as both turned toward the door, it was opened, and Pamela stood upon the threshold and faced them, looking at each in the breathless pause that followed.

"There has been a change," she said. "A change for the worse. I have sent for the doctor. You had better come down-stairs at once, Theodora, you have been here long enough to understand him better than we can."

And down together they went; and the first thing that met their eyes as they entered the sick-room, was Oglethorpe, sitting up in bed, with wild eyes, haggard and fever-mad, struggling with his attendants, who were trying to hold him down, and raving aloud in the old strain Theo had heard so often.

"Why, Theo, my beauty, there are tears in your eyes. Good-by! Yes! Forgive me! Forget me, and good-by! For God's sake, Priscilla, forgive me!"

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT COMES OF IT ALL.

The hardest professional trouble the shrivelled little French doctor had, perhaps, ever encountered, was the sight of the white, woe-stricken young face, turned up to his when Theodora North followed him out of the chamber upon the landing that night, and caught his arm in both her clinging hands.

"He will die now, doctor," she said, in an agonized whisper. "He will die now; I saw it in your face when you let his hand drop."

It would have been a hard-hearted individual who would have told the exact truth in the face of these beautiful, agonized eyes—and the little doctor was anything but hard of heart.

He patted the clinging hands quite affectionately, feeling in secret great apprehension, yet hiding his feelings admirably.

"My little mademoiselle," he said (the tall young creature at his side was almost regal, head and shoulders above him in height). "My dear little Mademoiselle Theodora, this will not do. If you give way, I shall give way too. You must help me—we must help each other, as we have been doing. It is you only who can save him—it is you he calls for. You must hope with me until some day when he awakes to know us, and then I shall show you to him, and say, 'here is the beautiful young mademoiselle who saved you.' And then we shall see, Miss Theodora—then we shall see what a charm those words will work."

But she did not seem to be comforted, as he expected she would be.

"No," she said. "The time will never come when you can say that to him. If he is ever well enough to know me, I must go away, and no one must tell him I have been here."

Monsieur, the doctor, looked at her over his spectacles, sharply.

The pale face at once touched and suggested to him the outline of a little romance—and he had all a Frenchman's sympathy for romance—monsieur, the doctor. It was *une grande passion*, was it, and this tractable, beautiful young creature was going to make a sacrifice of all her hope of love, upon the altar of stern honor. But he made no comment, only patted her hand again.

"Well, well," he said. "We shall see, mademoiselle, we shall see. Only let us hope."

The days and nights of watching, in companionship with Priscilla Gower, were a heavy trial to Theo. Not that any unusual coldness in the handsome face was added to her troubles as an extra burden. Both Priscilla and Pamela were very mindful of her comfort—so very mindful that their undemonstrative care for her cut her to the heart, sometimes. Yet, somehow, she felt herself as a stranger, without the right to watch with them. It was so terrible a thing to stand near the woman she had innocently injured, and listen with her to the impassioned adjurations of the lover who had been false, in spite of himself. It seemed his mind was always upon the one theme, and in his delirium his ravings wandered from Priscilla to Theo, and from Theo to Priscilla, in a misery that was not without its pathos. Sometimes it was that last night in Paris—and he went over his farewell, word for word; sometimes it was his wedding day—and he was frantically appealing to Priscilla for forgiveness, and remorsefully anathematizing himself.

They were both together in the room, one evening, when he was raving thus, when he suddenly paused for an instant and began to count slowly upon his fingers,

"January, February, March, April, May, June, July. My pretty Theo, what a mistake it was—only seven months, and then to have lost you. Good God, my darling!" and his voice became a low, agonized cry. "Good God, my darling! and I cannot give you up!"

Theo glanced up at Priscilla Gower, mute with misery for a moment. The erect, black-robed figure stood between herself and the fire, motionless, but the fixed face was so white that it forced a low cry from her. She could not bear it a second longer. She slipped upon her knees on the hearth rug,

and caught the hem of the black dress in her hands, in a tumult of despair and remorse.

"He does not know what he is saying," she cried, breathlessly. "Oh, forgive him, forgive him! I will go away now, if you think I ought. He knows that you are better than I am. I will go away, and you will make him happy. Oh! I know you will make him happier than I ever could have done, even if he had really loved me as—as he only thought he did."

A moment before, Priscilla had been gazing into the fire in a deep reverie. But the passionate voice stirred her. She looked down into the girl's imploring eyes, without a shadow of resentment.

"Get up," she said, a trifle huskily. "You have done no wrong to me. Get up, Theodora, and look at me."

Unsteadily as she spoke, there was so strange a power in her voice that Theo obeyed her. Wonderingly, sadly and humbly she rose to her feet, and stood before Priscilla as before a judge.

"Will you believe what I say to you?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Theo, sorrowfully.

"Well, then, I say this to you. You have not sacrificed me, you have saved me!"

It was perhaps characteristic of her that she did not say anything more. The subject dropped here, and she did not renew it.

It was a hard battle which Denis Oglethorpe fought during the next fortnight, in that small chamber of the wayside inn at St. Quentin; and it was a stern antagonist he waged war against—that grim old enemy, Death.

But, with the help of the little doctor, the *vis medicatrix natural*, and his three nurses, he gained the victory at length, and conquered, only by a hair's breadth. The fierce fire of the brain wearing itself out, left him as weak as a child, and for days after he returned to consciousness, he had scarcely power to move a limb or utter a word.

When first he opened his eyes upon life again, no one was in the room but Priscilla Gower; and so it was upon Priscilla Gower that his first conscious glance fell.

He looked at her for a minute, before he found strength to speak. But at last his faltering voice came back to him.

"Priscilla," he whispered weakly. "Is it you? Poor girl!"

She bent over him with a calm face, but she did not attempt to caress him.

"Yes," she said. "Don't try your strength too much yet, Denis. It is I."

His heavy wearied eyes searched hers for an instant.

"And no one else?" he whispered again. "Is no one else here, Priscilla?"

"There is no one else in the room with me," she answered, quietly. "The rest are up-stairs. You must not talk, Denis. Try to be quiet."

There was hardly any need for the caution, for his eyes were closing again, even then, through sheer exhaustion.

Theo was in her room lying down and trying to rest. But half an hour later, when Pamela came up to her bedside, the dark eyes flew wide open in an instant.

"What is it, Pam?" she asked. "Is he worse again?"

Pam sat down on the bedside, and looked at her with a sort of pity for the almost haggard young face drooping against the white pillow.

"No," she said. "He is better. The doctor said he would be, and he is. Theo, he has spoken to Priscilla Gower, and knows her."

Theo sat up in bed, white and still—all white, it seemed, but her large hollow eyes.

"Pamela," she said. "I must go home."

"Where?" said Pam.

The white face turned toward her pitifully.

"I don't know," the girl answered, her voice fluttering almost as weakly as Denis' had done. "I don't know—somewhere, though. To Paris again—or to Downport," with a faint shudder. And then, all at once she flung up her arms wildly, and dropped upon them, face downward.

"Oh, Pam," she cried out, "take me back to Downport, and let me die. I have no right here, and I had better go away. Oh, why did I ever come? Why did I ever come?"

She was sobbing in a hysterical, strained way, that was fairly terrible. Pamela bent over her, and touched her disordered hair with a singularly light touch. The tears welled up into her faded eyes. Just at the moment she could think of nothing but the day, so far away now, when her own heart had been torn up by the roots by one fierce grasp of the hand of relentless fate—the day when Arthur had died.

"Hush, Theo," she said to her, "don't cry, child."

But the feverish, excited sobs only came the faster, and more wildly.

"Why did I ever come?" Theo gasped. "It would have been better to have lived and died in Downport—far better, I can tell you now, Pam, now that it is all over. I loved him, and he loved me, too; he loved me always from the first, though we both tried so hard, so hard; yes, we did, Pamela, to help it. And now it is all ended, and I must never see him again. I must live and die, grow old—old, and never see him again."

There was no comfort for her. Her burst of grief and despair wore itself away into a strained quiet, and she lay at length in silence, Pamela at her side. But she was suffering fearfully in her intense girlish way.

She did not say much more to Pamela, but she had made up her mind, before many hours had passed, to return to Paris. She even got up in the middle of the night, in her feverish hurry to make her slight preparations for the journey. She could go to Paris and wait till Lady Throckmorton came back, if she had not got back already, and then she could do as she was told as to the rest. She would either stay there or go to Downport with Pamela.

Fortune, however, interposed. A carriage made its appearance, in the morning, with a new arrival—an arrival no less than Lady Throckmorton herself, bearing down upon them in actual excitement.

An untoward accident had called her friend from home, and taken her to Caen, and there, at her earnest request, her ladyship had accompanied her. The blunder of an awkward servant had prevented her receiving the letters from St. Quentin, and it was only on her return to Paris that she had learned the truth.

Intense as was her bewilderment at her protege's indiscretion, she felt a touch of admiration, at the simple, faithful daring of the girl's course.

"It is sufficiently out of the way for Priscilla Gower to be here, and she is his promised wife; and Pamela is nearly thirty-two years old and looks forty; but you, Theodora—you to run away from Paris, with no one but a maid; to run away to nurse a man like Denis Oglethorpe. It actually takes away my breath. My dear, innocent little simpleton, what were you thinking about?"

It would be futile to attempt to describe her state of mind when she discovered that Denis had not learned of Theo's presence in the house.

But, being quick-sighted, and keen of sense, she began to comprehend at last, and it was Priscilla Gower who assisted her to a clearer state of mind.

Two days later, when, after a visit to his patient, the little doctor was preparing to take his departure, Priscilla Gower addressed him suddenly, as it seemed, without the slightest regard to her ladyship's presence.

"You think your patient improves rapidly," she said.

"Very rapidly," was the answer. "Men like him always do, mademoiselle."

She bent her head in acquiescence.

"I have a reason for asking this," she said. "Do you think he is strong enough to bear a shock?"

"Of what description, mademoiselle? Of grief, or—or of joy?"

"Of joy, monsieur," she answered, distinctly.

"Mademoiselle," said the doctor, "joy rarely kills."

She bent her erect head again.

She had not regarded the fact of her old enemy's presence ever so slightly while she spoke, but when the doctor was gone she addressed her.

"I have been thinking of returning to London at once, if possible," she said. "Miss Gower's ill-health renders any further absence a neglect. If I go, would it be possible for you to remain here, with Miss North?"

"Pamela?" suggested Lady Throckmorton.

"Theodora," was the calm reply.

An odd silence of a moment, and then the eyes of the two women met each other, in one long, steady look; Lady Throckmorton's profoundly searching, wonderingly questioning; Priscilla Gower's steadfast, calm, almost defiant.

Then Lady Throckmorton spoke.

"I will stay," she said, "and she shall stay with me."

"Thank you," with another slight bend of the handsome head. "I am going now to speak to Mr. Oglethorpe. When I open the door will you send Miss North, Theodora, to me?"

"Yes," answered her ladyship.

So Priscilla Gower crossed the narrow landing, and went into the sick-room, and her ladyship summoned Theodora North, and bade her wait, not telling her why. What passed behind the closed doors only three people can tell, and those three people are Denis Oglethorpe, his wife, and the woman who, in spite of her coldness, was truer to him than he dared be to himself. There was no sound of raised or agitated voices, all was calm and seemingly silent. Fifteen minutes passed—half an hour; nearly an hour, and then Priscilla Gower stepped out upon the landing, and Lady Throckmorton spoke to Theo.

"Go to her," was her command. "She wants you."

The poor child arose mechanically and went out. She did not understand why she was wanted—she scarcely cared. She merely went because she was told. But when she looked up at Priscilla Gower, she caught her breath and drew back. But Priscilla held out her hand to her.

"Come," she commanded. And before Theo had time to utter a word, she was drawn into the chamber, and the door closed.

Denis was lying upon a pile of pillows, and pale as he was, she saw, in one instant, that something had happened, and that he was not unhappy, whatever his fate was to be.

"I have been telling Mr. Oglethorpe," Priscilla said to her, "all that you have done, Theodora. I have been telling him how you forgot the world, and came to him when he was at the world's mercy. I have told him, too, that five years ago he made a great mistake which I shared with him. It was a great mistake, and it had better be wiped out and done away with, and we have agreed what it shall be. So I have brought you here—"

All the blood in Theodora North's heart surged into her face, in a great rush of anguish and bewilderment.

"No! no!" she cried out. "No! no! only forgive him, and let me go. Only forgive him, and let him begin again. He must love you—he does love you. It was my fault—not his. Oh—"

Priscilla stopped her, smiling, in a half-sad way.

"Hush!" she said, quietly. "You don't understand me. The fault was only the fault of the old blunder. Don't try to throw your happiness away, Theodora. You were not made to miss it. I have not been blind all these months. How could I be? I only wanted to wait and make sure that this was not a blunder, too. I have known it from the first. Theo, I have done now—the old tangle is unravelled. Go to him, Theo, he wants you."

The next instant the door closed upon Priscilla, as she went out, and Theodora North understood clearly what she had before never dared to dream of.

There was one brief, breathless pause, and then Denis Oglethorpe held out his arms.

"My darling," he said. "Mine, my own."

She slipped down by his side, beautiful, tremulous, with glowing cheeks and tear-wet eyes. She remembered Priscilla Gower then.

"Oh, my love!" she cried. "She is better than I am, braver and more noble; but she can never love you better, or be more faithful and true than I will be. Only try me; only try me, my darling."

Three months subsequently, when Pamela and Priscilla had settled down again to the routine of their old lives, there was a quiet wedding celebrated at Paris—a quiet wedding, though it was under Lady Throckmorton's patronage.

In their tender remembrance of Priscilla Gower, it was made a quiet wedding—so quiet, indeed, that the people who made the young English beauty's romance a topic of conversation and nine days' wonder, scarcely knew it had ended.

And in Broome street, Priscilla Gower read the announcement in the paper, with only the ghost of a faint pang.

"I suppose I am naturally a cold woman," she wrote to Pamela North, with whom she sustained a faithful correspondence. "I will acknowledge, at least, to a certain lack of enthusiasm. I can be faithful, but I cannot be impassioned. It is impossible for me to suffer as your pretty Theo could, as it is equally impossible for me to love as she did. I have lost something, of course, but I have not lost all."

Between these two women there arose a friendship which was never dissolved. Perhaps the one thing they had in common, drew them toward each other; at any rate, they were faithful; and even when, three years later, Priscilla Gower married a man who loved her, and having married him, was a calmly happy woman, they were faithful to each other still.

THE END.

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